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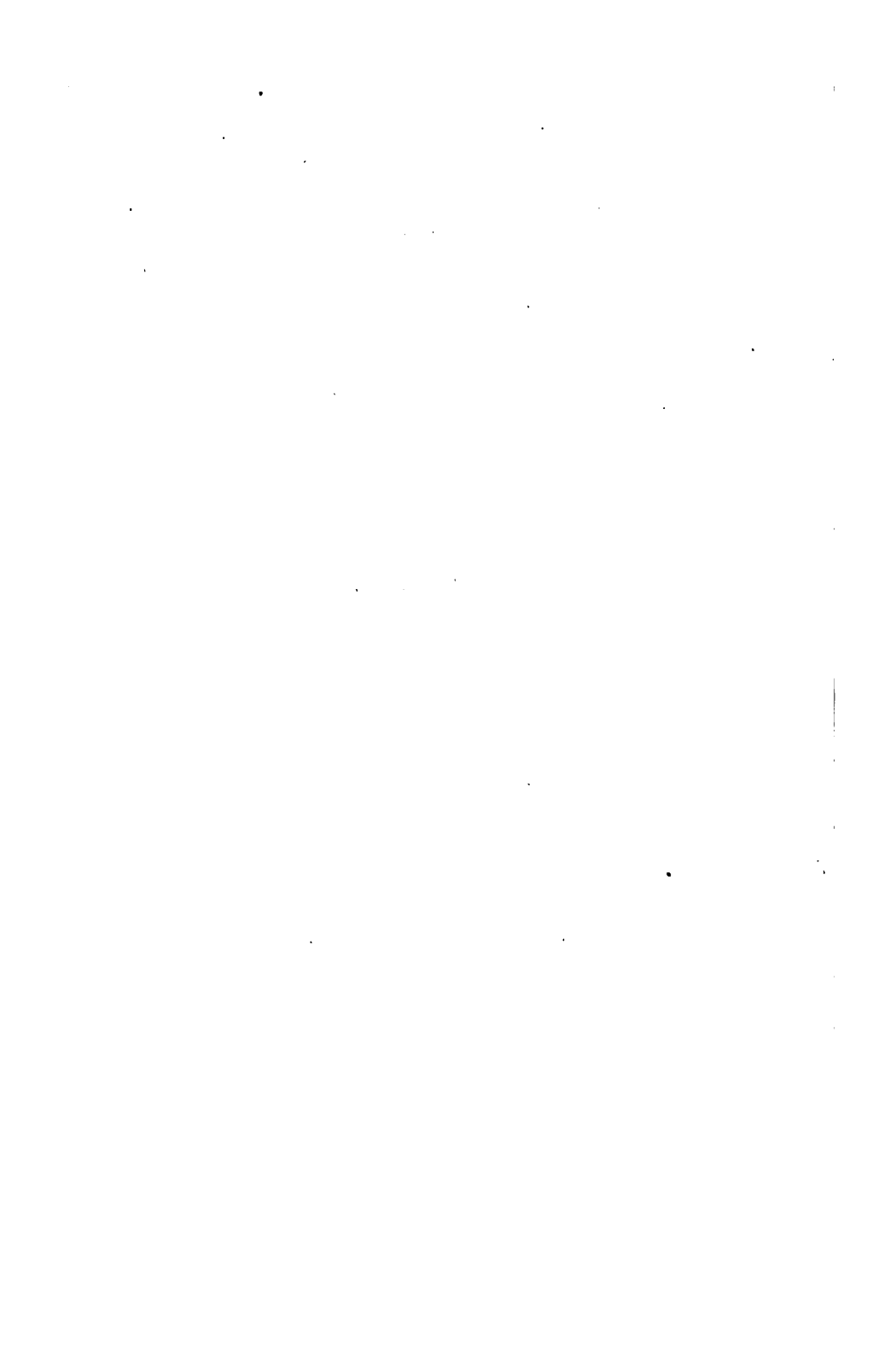




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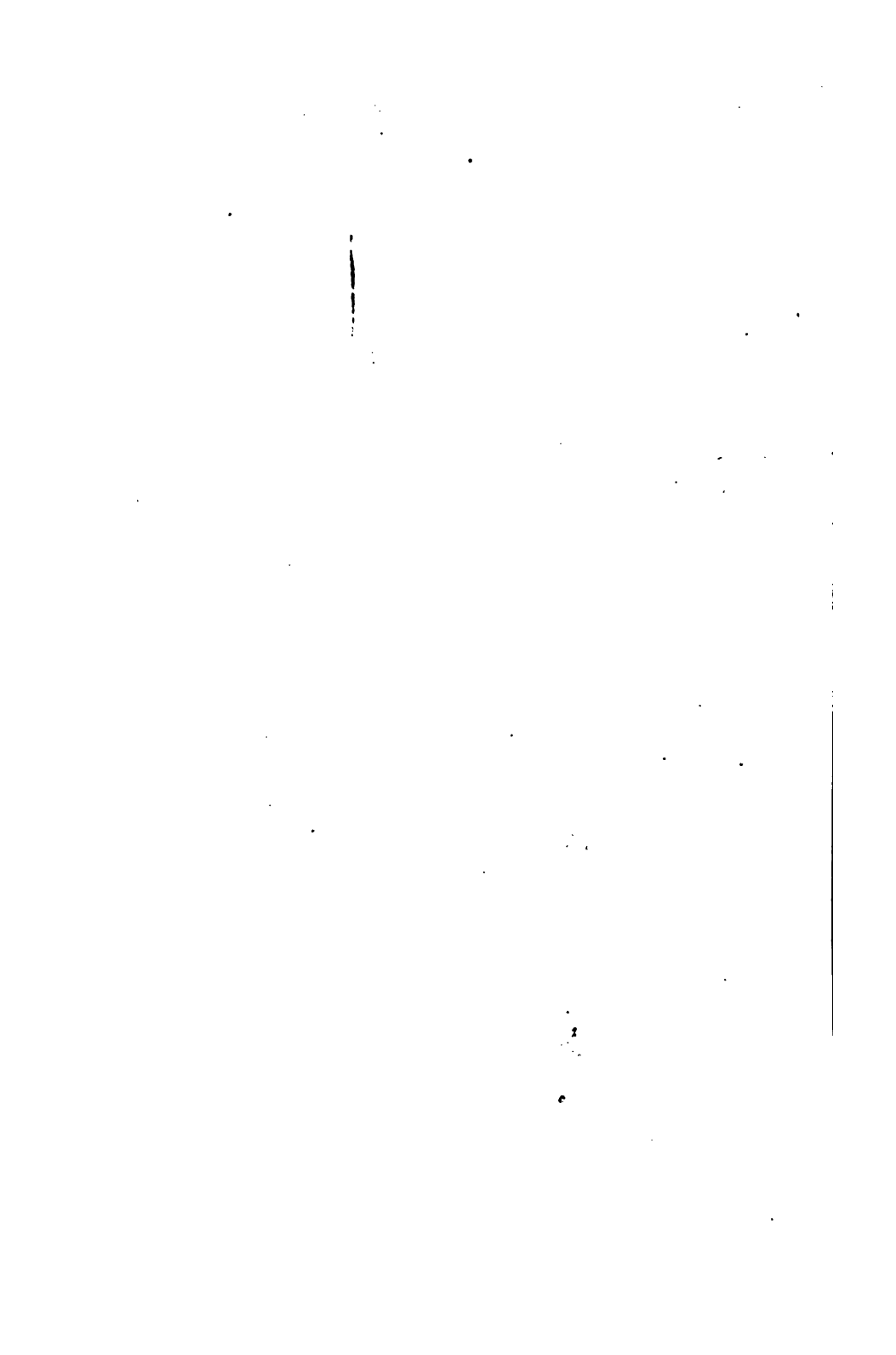


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FROM BIRTH TO BRIDAL.

VOL. I.

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# FROM BIRTH TO BRIDAL.

BY

MRS. DAY.

"Each soul lives, longs, and works  
For itself, by itself, because a lodestar lurks  
An other than itself."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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## FROM BIRTH TO BRIDAL.

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### CHAPTER I.

**I**T was early in the afternoon, but the stillness of Dr. Harrison's house was like that of midnight. The child sat in her nursery, with the bit of pretty silk patchwork that had amused her for a week tossed on the floor, and the ballads of Robin Hood unread upon her knee.

How silent it was in-doors ! how oppressed was her little heart ! she seemed to hear nothing, see nothing ; and then suddenly the silence changed into rushing, all-per-vading sound. She sprang from her stool, frightened. She must go somewhere, she

must do something. She climbed on to the broad window-ledge, and looked into the pleasant, old-fashioned garden. Nobody there, nor was there any real sound such as her overcharged brain had fancied.

The thrushes were piping softly in the sunshine, and the buds were turning green; her mind took in these things half unconsciously, and with a half-sigh she said,

“I wonder if I might go out; I have only been once in the garden with papa to-day.”

There was no one to ask; she was her own mistress. With a quaint feeling of responsibility she put on her ordinary hat and jacket, and got her gloves; slowly and quietly opened the door, and walked out into the passage. At the top of the staircase she stood and looked wistfully down a dark oak-floored gallery, with a narrow crimson carpet running along

its centre towards a closed door, the door that parted her from all her little world. A faint sigh of "mamma" fluttered from her lips, as she went her way down the low broad stairs, without stopping at the doors of what she knew were empty sitting-rooms, out through the garden-door. The garden, her play-place, seemed as still and deserted as the house, perhaps more so, for in the house she was often bidden to be quiet; in the garden she might romp as she pleased. The silence and oppression there were too great for her, the birds seemed like stranger voices calling to her; and with one quick look at the white blinds drawn down the windows in her mother's room, she turned and went out of the gate into the street, still quietly and decorously, for there was a method and purpose in the child's actions, though they were almost unconscious.

Across the broad green close she passed. Some men who were sweeping looked at the tiny trim figure, wondering to see her there alone; and through the open door she went into the Cathedral, the only place beside her father's house in which she was at home; her heavenly Father's house, where could she be more truly at home, where less alone?

The bells began to chime for service, and the child took her place, as she had often done with her mother. Probably had she been asked she could not have told her purpose, nor could she have described the train of her thoughts; but in after-years that day and its every occurrence and sensation remained clearly cut in her memory.

After the service she went into the cloisters, and sat down full of thoughts. The sunlight streamed upon her sunny hair and violet frock, and the organ within the church

still pealed out upon the air. A verger passed her with his wife, and she heard him say in a low tone :

“Poor little girl, I hear her mother is dying.”

The tone was low, but yet it broke the dreamy oppression of the last few hours, and the child burst into tears. Bitterly and long she wept, though not loudly, for she was overpowered by a sense of loneliness and desolation, rather than of wrong or injury. The sun sank low behind the vast white buildings, setting red in the west, and fringing the light clouds with gold ; the birds sang their sweetest even-song, the organ was hushed, and a young voice with a slight foreign accent said to her :

“Why do you weep, little girl?”

“Mamma is dying, they say, and I am all alone,” whispered the child, after some moments’ pause.

"I am alone too," rejoined the stranger, sitting down by her side.

"But you do not cry," said she. "Are you unhappy?"

"Often."

Something in the tone with which that one word was uttered made the child look up. The boy beside her, a few years older than herself, sat looking away to the red west, with the sad shadow of his last word hovering about his mouth; she watched him silently, till he turned his soft dark eyes upon her, and then, meeting hers, of grey hazel, intently fixed upon him, he smiled. She could not have told anyone that the dark chestnut hair, and eyes to match, with the colour that mantled in his brown cheek, were new to her, and pleased her; but he perhaps had full consciousness of all the links in the chain of thought that suggested his next words.

“Do you like violets? Come, then, we will get some—dark single ones, and pale double ones. I like the double ones best, Neapolitan—southern ones, you know.”

She nodded; they were mostly new words to her, but she felt, if she did not understand them. She got up to go with him, her eyes still wet, her soft cheeks flushed, and still undried, so simple, so sweet, like the flowers he proposed to get her. Away to the organist's house they went silently together. He pushed open the gate, and called towards the house,

“I have brought a little girl with me, Mr. Adams—I may give her some violets, may I not?”

A voice answered from within in kindly permission, and into the little garden under the south wall the children went. A bit of old monastic wall sheltered it, and there stood two beehives. There would blow in



the Summer soon the organist's joy and pride, roses of every shade ; and there now grew and blossomed the sweet flowers with which the stranger boy had lured the child from her sorrow. He filled her small hands with them, telling her how the bees loved them, and flew in and out, murmuring to the sweetest of them all the sunny hours of the day : and how, in southern lands of France and Italy, the most delicious of all perfumes was made from such flowers as these.

The sun had sunk, the children came out of the garden, and the boy ran into the house, returning with a bright silk thread, to tie the flowers. She smiled up in his face, and Mrs. Adams stood at her parlour window watching them.

" Goodness me ! " cried she, " it is little Miss Harrison ; she ought to be at home." In another minute she had put on her

bonnet and come out to them. "I will take you home, my dear. I don't suppose you know your way."

The voice was strange to her, but a kind one, and the child unhesitatingly gave her hand with the same grave decorum that had possessed her all the afternoon.

"Good-bye, little lady—good-bye, flower," said the boy with the dark eyes, laying his hand on her shoulder; she had no hand at liberty to offer him for the usual shake. Gravely, and with childish grace, she curtseyed to him.

"Good-bye, fairy boy, and thank you."

"Vera! Vera!—where is Vera?" were the first words the child heard as her father's door was opened for her.

She had walked the short distance home in silence with Mrs. Adams, partly because she had lost herself in the sweet Spring after-

noon, fairyland to her—partly because she was greatly fatigued. Mrs. Adams knew the sorrow hanging over the child's head, and forbore to talk to her.

“Vera!—where is Vera?” It was her father's voice. “My darling child!—your mother!—ah! thank you, Mrs. Adams. I cannot stop, forgive me—Vera, come!”

He lifted her in his arms, pulled off her hat and threw it down, as he strode up the stairs.

The door that had been closed a few hours before was open now; softly the father entered, and laid the child on the bed beside the mother's feebly-raised hand.

“Violets, mamma!—double ones for you!” whispered the child. “A fairy boy gave me them. They are for you.”

“For me, Vera!—how sweet! God bless you, Vera! You will not forget me!

Love papa!—love papa!” slowly and gaspingly came the words.

Vera heard. She was too young—all was too strange for her to do more than she had done all day—feel, feel; why or how, she could not tell. Then there came again the rushing, all-pervading sound she had heard before that day, and then all was quite still. Vera had fainted, and her mother was dead!

The child’s violets were laid upon the mother’s breast. She never asked for them; but a year afterwards, when she again saw some blooming, she pressed closer to her father, whispering:

“There are violets in heaven; mamma took mine with her!”

## CHAPTER II.

VERA HARRISON had said she was all alone—poor burdened little heart, fearing the wonderful and sudden glimpse into the future opened before her. Her imagination could not conceive a world without her mother, where days and nights must come and go, and never in them should she hear the pleasant voice, or meet the ever-ready smile. The guide, the teacher, the playmate—for Edith Harrison had been all these to her child—was snatched from her at once. She could not mark the progress of disease in the uncomplaining mother, who seemed always in her

usual place at table, or in her drawing-room, and was always to be found by her child ; only in the last few weeks—or were they days, for childhood seldom reckons time correctly?—had a shadow crept upon her life.

The house was very still ; the servants did not sing at their work ; the little brother's shouts were often hushed by nurse, with a tear in her eye ; and the father moved gravely and softly about the house, paler than his wont. If he met his children, he would lay his hand gently on their heads, perhaps stoop and kiss them, but rarely speak—that cheery father ! The mother was in her drawing-room less and less, and at last Vera never found her there ; and no dessert followed her father's dinner now.

How long this change had been coming Vera could not tell, when that long and loneliest last day of her mother's life

arrived. Papa and mamma,—the beacons, the strong pillars of the child's life,—and now one light was quenched, one pillar thrown down. She was old enough to feel, though not to reason. There was to be a new order of things, and for her it was as if there was no order; she was not big enough or strong enough to meet this new, mysterious, and therefore fearful, change with self-possession.

She sat alone, and very young and helpless, in the cloisters, and wept, and out of her full heart she said that she was all alone. Vera forgot then her brother's curly head and merry ways, the sturdy brother who toddled about with her on the terrace, or to her favourite haunt in the shrubbery, to play with acorns or chestnuts.

"Master George is always safe with Miss Vera," nurse would say with pride.

She had forgotten nurse, too, who had

been with her from her birth, had cared for her like a second mother, had made all her pretty frocks, and dressed her little-cared-for dolls, had heard her lessons in her mother's absence, and whose gentle, unobtrusive influence had greatly moulded the child. And she had forgotten her father, between whom and herself already existed the deep and subtle tie that often binds father and daughter in the tenderest sympathy.

Dr. Harrison had cherished a most passionate affection for his child from the time, some two years before, when he had been attacked with scarlet-fever; and she, missing him out of her daily life, asked for him, and prayed to be allowed to go to him; it was unkind to leave papa alone. Obtaining only refusals to her request, she waited her opportunity of escaping unobserved, and her mother found her fast asleep in her father's arms.



"Let her alone, Edith," said he; "it is too late to move her now."

Vera took the fever from her father; but he often told the story of her with a flutter of pride at his heart.

The Spring deepened into Summer, and the garden was gay with flowers. Vera sat in the shade on the grass, reading or working with nurse, and playing sometimes with George; but things were very still about the child. Everyone wore black in the house; the pianoforte in the drawing-room was closed; the long lounging-chair her mother always used had been carried into her father's study and folded up; and her father came in and out as usual, with ever a sweet smile, but few words yet for his children. He often took Vera in the carriage with him when he visited his patients, but he was sad and silent, and would hold her little hand in his without a word; and she

would stroke and fondle him, knowing his sorrow and his patience. The child's unspoken sympathy soothed him more than wiser things.

She went to the Cathedral services with him, and stood in the cloisters by the slab that covered her mother's grave, where the morning sunlight fell, chequered by the cedar boughs; and she remembered the day she had been there alone, and the dark-eyed boy who comforted her. But no one spoke to her about that day; in the hurry and grief of her mother's death, and the sorrowful, dark time that followed it, her little fairy-tale had never transpired, and with the curious reticence of children she had never spoken of it. Yet when she stood there in the cloisters, her eyes would glance towards the opposite side, and she could have laid her fingers on the spot

where she had sat when the boy spoke to her.

The Summer weeks passed by ; the strawberries in the long, sunny garden were all gone, the children had eaten the last lingering ones after their early dinner, and Vera had gone with the gardener to pull green-gages from the old tree trained on the stable wall, and had brought them in the little basket of Brazilian grass her mother had always used for the same purpose, to her father, as he sat on the broad stone steps outside his study window in the evening. He remembered the basket well, and was pleased to see it in his little daughter's hand. He bade her take care of it, and she knew from the tone of his voice that in some way the basket was connected with her lost mother.

The stone steps outside the study were Dr. Harrison's usual seat in the warm even-

ings ; he sat there reading the *Times* now, and watching his children's shadows lengthen on the grass. Vera was rolling a beautiful Summer golden pippin for George to run after. Their happy laughter did not disturb him. By-and-by nurse's voice was heard calling to the children to come in—the sunlight was gone, there was only shadow now. The father went and hoisted his boy on his shoulder to carry him in, first putting him into the apple-tree, that he might gather a big yellow apple for nurse ; and then he bade Vera come and sit with him awhile. Quite still they sat, she with her head against his knee. At last he said,

“What do you like, Vera?”

“Like, papa!—what do you mean? I like fruit, and out of doors, and roses, and,” hearing the low cooing of wood-doves in the trees beyond the garden, “I like that ; and,” in a soft tone, “I like you, papa.”

He smiled, partly at her simpleness, partly at his own inability to understand a child's wandering mind and fancy.

"Well then, Vera, what do you know? —what can you do?"

She looked up quickly.

"Oh! papa, I can't do anything but read. Is that *very* stupid?"

He laughed. "Not very wise, certainly." And then he sighed, but observing how intently the child watched his changing moods, and changed with them, he said cheerfully, "'Early to bed, and early to rise, makes a girl healthy, and wealthy, and wise.' We will leave out the wealthy, little woman; but I would like you to be wise and healthy, so suppose you go to bed now, and when she has tucked you up, tell nurse to come to me in the study. Come in, Brand, and sit down," he called when, after an hour, nurse knocked at the study

door. "I want to talk to you. What does Vera know?"

"She can read almost anything, sir; and seems to like every book she can get hold of; and she can write, and work, too—but she does not like that, except at odd times, and to help me finish something for Master George. And then, sir, mistress had begun to teach her the piano, and I know she thought she would learn that well."

"Ah! yes. But," after a pause, and twisting absently in his hand the sugar-tongs in the small tea-equipage before him, "she must go on learning, and have some one to teach her. I was thinking, Brand, of asking my sister-in-law to spend a week here. I could talk to her, and ask her opinion."

"Why not, sir?" put in Brand.

"Well, then, I will write to-night, and ask her to bring her two daughters, and

come here at once. If my brother can come, so much the better."

"I hope Captain Harrison can come," said nurse, who liked the Captain well, but did not at all affect the Captain's wife.

"Then, Brand, you will see to everything being prepared for them; and we must do what we can to make the place pleasant to them, though doubtless they will only regard it as a little change, and will not feel it dull."

Nurse had nothing to say to meet that sad tone, which found an echo in her own heart, so she wished her master good night as cheerily as she could, and took her way to the kitchen.

"Whatever had master got to say to you to-night, Mrs. Brand?" cried cook, as the nurse went into the small, neat parlour, where the other three maids were sitting—one at work, the other writing a letter, and

the speaker in a state of blissful idleness. Late dinner was over some time ago, and she did not "want to put her eyes out like them young things," so now she was quite prepared for a chat with nurse. "You're such a stranger here, Brand, that we'll just make you welcome now you are come. Lucy, be quick and put your scribbling away, and get some supper."

Lucy laid the cloth accordingly, and cook produced from her own private treasure a bottle of cowslip wine, a part of a cake, sent from her own mother far away in the North—these, with a currant tart, and the usual bread and cheese and beer, made a highly-appreciated repast; and cook's question was once more asked—

"Whatever had master to say to you to-night?"

"He began to speak to me about Miss Vera——"



"Not to send her to school, I hope?" broke in the two younger maids.

"No, but he says some one must teach her, and then he said he would ask Captain and Mrs. Harrison to come here directly on a visit, and he would talk to them a little. And he wants us to put all things ready for them."

"Hum!" said the cook, drinking her wine, slowly and apparently engrossed with its flavour, and watching the nurse all the while, for it was well known that Mrs. Captain Harrison was no favourite with nurse.

But nurse sat very quietly near the open window, crumbling a bit off her cake to feast the kitten that was perched on the window-ledge."

"You see," said she, as if in answer to the unspoken comments, "Mrs. Frank Harrison is about the only lady-relative Vera has got, and it stands to reason her papa should wish

to speak to some lady about her. She ought to care for her, if she doesn't; and I don't know that poor mistress's aunt can do much for her. The visit may do my master good, he was always fond of his brother, and he ought to have some one to help him a little. I declare he thinks of everything; he asked me the other day when Georgie would go into knickerbockers, and if Vera's black hat wasn't too hot for her; and he never made one mistake about the mourning that was ordered for all of us."

"There," said cook, magnanimously, "after listening to so excellent a piece of reasoning, "I vote we all begin and get the house ready to-morrow; and we'll have it as fine as fippence, for I know Mrs. Frank of old, poking her nose in everywhere."

If nurse were agreeable, the other servants took their cue from her; and the *séance* broke up.

The invitation was given and accepted, and within a week Captain and Mrs. Harrison were to arrive, accompanied by their two little girls. In the gravest and steadiest way, Vera went round with Brand to see that all was in readiness ; for Brand thought she might as well teach her nursling what she considered a necessary part of a well-brought-up young lady's education—Brand being a servant of the older order of things, very conscientious and very domestic, and not far wrong in her judgment. Whenever Vera seemed to tire a little, or to wish to run off to the gardener, nurse would encourage her with a smile of praise, or yet more by the words, "Your dear mamma always saw to these things herself, dear."

Vera hung her favourite text, "Suffer the little children to come unto me,"—her favourite picture of the Infant St. John and the lamb, in her cousin's bed-room, and put

her prettiest books into their shelves ; and on the day when the guests came, she put flowers on the dressing-tables, and arranged others, with Brand's help, in two pretty baskets for the drawing-room.

## CHAPTER III.

“**Y**ES, Vera is charming—a sweet, amiable child, and so obedient,” Mrs. Harrison said to her brother-in-law at dinner, the second day of her visit to Salisbury, with the blindest of smiles, watching him as she spoke.

“I am glad you are pleased with her,” answered he, gravely. “I believe her impulses are very good ; but my little girl has lived so quiet and sheltered a life that, as yet, no storms or trials have come near her.”

“She is so pretty, too, that, with a little care and pains, she may become quite *distin-*

*guée* ; and she is always ready to give up her own pleasure. My darlings are getting quite fond of her. It is such a happy visit for them."

A shriek from the nursery, and a violently-slammed door, interrupted the lady's praises, and Dr. Harrison looked up quickly from the biscuit he was meditatively breaking up, as Vera marched into the dining-room, with flashing eyes, and a deep red spot on her cheek.

"Papa," she said, "my cousins have torn the new book you gave me ; and they laugh at my hair cut short like a boy's, and I told them you and *mámma* liked it so ; and then they said I was *asburd*, and then—and then I believe I was very naughty and rude, for Brand said I was a disgrace to her and you, and that she would tell you to-night ; and see, I came to tell you myself."

"Manfully said, Vera," cried her uncle ;  
"like a brave man, too !"

But her father shook his head.

"That is not a pretty story at all, my child ; but we will not speak of it now, only if you have been rude to your cousins you must ask their pardon, and show them you are sorry."

Vera looked rather crestfallen, but she climbed up on to her father's knee, and rubbed her derided head against his breast.

"Susan, tell Brand to bring the other children down to dessert ; Miss Vera will stay here."

The tall parlour-maid finished clearing the table, setting fruit and wine and fresh glasses, and then took the message to the nursery.

Brand went into the kitchen after she had left her charges at the door of the dining-room, rather scandalised at her young lady's behaviour ; but she could not help laughing at Susan's account of how Miss Vera came

in as bold as you please, and how for her part she, Susan, was sure master was proud of her in his heart, and could not abide the other stuck-up little things. Altogether it came to be considered rather *grand* of Miss Vera ; but then certainly Susan coloured the picture highly for the benefit of the groom, who came in with the week's stable-account for his master. Nurse felt uneasy and doubtful about the future, but kept her trouble to herself.

In the meantime, when her cousins sat down to dessert, Vera slid off her father's knee, selected the nicest plums and peaches for them, and whispered, as she gave one to each,

"I am very sorry, Isabel. I am very sorry, Marian."

The children went to bed, and coffee was served in the drawing-room. Dr. Harrison and his brother played a game at picquet,



chatting together over old friends. Mrs. Harrison sang them some favourite ballads. Turning from the piano, she said,

“Why do you cut Miss Vera’s hair so short?—she is dressed so very plainly too for these days; you can afford to do anything you please for her.”

“Yes, anything I think *good* for her,” he replied with some emphasis. “I am not very fond of what you call *these days*; I do not wish her to conform to mere caprices of fashion; you had a specimen this evening of what a very decided and strong-willed little person she is. I am anxious to guard her against herself; you cannot alter character, but you may direct it. I want her to learn to rule herself, and self-denial, even in small matters of plain dress and hair, is, I believe, a part of the lesson. She has no mother, too, to soften down hard lines. It was on her account chiefly, I asked

you to visit me. I cannot spare time to come to you, and I thought Frank here might contrive to bring you. I want to have your opinion what I had better do for my children. I do not promise to take your advice, but I shall be glad to have it."

"Send them both to school, George," broke in the Captain, "the youngster as soon as he is big enough, and missy now; there must be plenty of good and proper people ready to take them, and it would save you a world of trouble and thought."

"And leave me very lonely, Frank; besides, I do not quite like girls' schools. I have seen something of them during my professional life; there is a good deal of neglect of body, and mind, and heart—not wilful neglect, but attendant on the very system of general instruction. I am inclined to think I prefer individual training, for girls at any rate; and until our ways are a

little more advanced, and they receive by general consent a wider and deeper form of education—until, too, the women to whom we entrust our girls have learned to rule themselves, to be good and steady women of business, to understand what they profess to teach, and yet withal to retain the tender womanly heart.”

Mrs. Harrison did not venture to interrupt the doctor’s *crotchets*, as she called them ; but the Captain leaned back in his chair, and said, with a laugh,

“What in the world, George, has made you so great a believer in the women?”

“Two things, or rather people—my mother and my wife—*perfect women, nobly planned*. But remember, I only uphold the women for what they may be, not for what they are. God forbid that the over-dressed, loud-voiced, affected fools one constantly sees should come to hold place and power !

I beg your pardon, my dear Marian," stopping in his hasty walk up and down the room, and looking at her astonished face ; "I quite forgot that my vehemence might alarm you."

"I knew you were an advocate for more freedom to be allowed to us women, but I did not know you were so severe a critic upon us. I am sure I, for one, am quite content with the place and power I hold, and would never attempt to be more than I am," said Mrs. Harrison, with a sort of timid pride in her look at her big, indulgent, brave husband.

The doctor smiled, for he knew that the pretty, stylish woman had her own way at home.

"There surely are some good schools," said she again. "I fancy a girl learns what place she holds amongst others ; and then, if the principal be a lady, she learns lady-

like ways, and how to bear herself in the world."

"Questionable advantages—outside varnish ; the wood may still be unseasoned."

"But there need be no question of schools. Frank authorized me to ask you if you would like Vera to come and live with us, and we will dismiss our daily governess, and have a resident governess for the three girls. You shall see her, and help to select her yourself, and I promise you to be a loving aunt. Do not answer decidedly now—think of it—it may suit you. Frank, you——"

"All right, Molly. George knows quite well that we will take as much care of the child as if she were our own."

"Thank you both—you are very good. But," after a pause, "I should be lonelier than ever without my child. I suppose there might be objections to my having a governess at home for her—I mean a resident governess?"

The doctor said this in a slightly questioning tone.

"Yes," answered the Captain, "that arrangement might be open to objections. Why not have masters for her, and let that excellent Brand take the supervision?"

"Brand!" cried Mrs. Harrison—"she is only a servant. Vera would have no manners at all."

"I am not so sure," said the doctor, with a smile, "that I should find fault with Brand's manners. Vera will learn nothing but what is good and honest from her; she would at least be kind, courteous, and unaffected. But it is getting late, and you must remember, Marian, you promised to be up in good time to-morrow for our excursion to the Plains. I am going to give myself a special holiday in honour of you, and I want you to tell me what you think of my new horse. Tom is to put him into the waggonette in the morning."

Two or three more sunny days, not very eventful, passed by; a game at croquet with the children, a long country ramble, and a drive; and then Captain and Mrs. Harrison left the quiet house for the Isle of Wight, and no more was ever said about Vera.

After all, Dr. Harrison would have to settle with himself the weighty question of his daughter's education. Now, though he was perfectly clear in his ideas, and singularly orderly in his habits, and though he was skilful and decided in his professional matters, he very much disliked making up his mind in other affairs, and especially where his children were concerned. He asked Vera if she would like to go and live at Brighton with her aunt and cousins.

"Away from you, papa!" was her immediate reply; and, on questioning her more particularly, he could only make out that she would like to see the sea—the idea of

such a life presented no other attraction to her.

He then told her he was thinking of getting a governess for her.

"Then she will come to-morrow, I suppose. Where shall I have my lessons?"

The prompt decision of the child took him rather by surprise; but at last the father really did seek the lady he wanted, and not only go on thinking about it. He waived all suggested disadvantages, and secured a governess very highly recommended, and represented to be "a perfect treasure." But, somehow, Vera was often in violent collision with her, and one day having received an unusually severe box on the ear, she told her she disliked the operation so much that the next time she would resent it by throwing the lady out of window!—very improper conduct, of course, and Miss Smith declared she would inform Dr.



Harrison, which trouble Vera spared her by informing him herself.

Poor Miss Smith did her best ; she spoilt George to her heart's content, and was unwise to Vera because she did not understand her. So, after about two years, George was sent to a clergyman in the town as daily pupil, and another treasure was found for Vera. Miss Jones sang very nicely, and was very pretty, and she made the most of these gifts to endeavour to win Dr. Harrison's regard. But the unlucky Vera was not long in discovering that Miss Jones was not infallible in her French, and that her acquaintance with history was less than her own ; so, after four uneventful but very uncomfortable years, when Vera was nearly fourteen, Dr. Harrison found himself once more obliged to think what was best to be done with his children.

He had kept them at home, because the

idea of being there in his lonely house without them was intolerable to him. Had he done right? Many in S—— and its neighbourhood would fain have consoled him. Many an eye brightened for him—many a lip smiled, for he was a great favourite, but he had been proof against all ; and yet many wise folk prophesied the doctor's troubles could only be met by a wife's care. One day an old lady, who had been his patient and friend for many years, ventured to suggest this solution to him.

## CHAPTER IV.

HE went home greatly disturbed, and at night sent for Brand.

“Sit down there, Brand, and let me talk to you. I do not care about your answering me, but it will be a relief to talk to a faithful heart. I am in doubt about the children” (Brand knew it as well as he did). “My brother is abroad, and I do not think the children cared much about their last visit to Brighton. Vera said she was always out shopping. My poor little girl seems to have her share of trouble; I don’t mean that she is unhappy, but somehow things go wrong with her. It is my fault, or hers, or

the fault of the people who have had charge of her. She is not idle or ill-tempered?"

"I am sure, sir, there is not a better child. To you, sir, to me she is always good and obedient; but she will not be driven, and from her youngest years would always have a reason for what she did; she is quick-tempered too, and is up directly she thinks herself or anyone else used unjustly."

"And then I have no complaints of George, but it is quite clear he is as idle as he can be. If I could get a private tutor I fancy that would suit us all best—at any rate, I have a mind to try it. He shall teach both the children, and you will have to sit in the school-room all day, Brand—should you dislike that?"

"I should dislike nothing, sir, that made the children happier, and that you wished."

Good, faithful heart, how few such are to be met with now!—the race of those ser-

vants, who found their pride and honour in serving well, thinking it no shame that they did not govern, seems to be extinct.

During the last four years, Dr. Harrison had re-modelled the habits of his life to meet his children's needs. He dined with them early, abolishing the late dinner; sometimes he went out to dinner, if not, he sat part of the evening with them, when he would read aloud, or join in their songs—they had all musical taste—and part of the time he spent alone in his study. He shared their morning and evening devotions, and sang with them the hymn that always preceded the evening prayers. He went to the Cathedral services with them whenever his duties permitted; he ordered himself in lowly wise, for their example.

One Sunday the governess had rebuked little George for not kneeling at the prayers, and sitting leaning over his book. "Papa

never kneels down," quoth George. The speech was reported to the father, who, without a word of comment, never omitted to kneel at prayers from thenceforward. He was careful in every word and action that he might not inadvertently cause offence to either of his little ones. He encouraged all their sports and pursuits, helping them in their collections of natural objects with his own stores of information in animal and vegetable life. He had gymnastic apparatus provided for them, and Vera became as great a proficient as her brother in outdoor exercise.

The children had very few acquaintances; Dr. Harrison rarely allowed them to go to children's parties; he himself had few intimate friends, and only at rare intervals had a small party at dinner, when Vera, after having come to dessert, was always expected by her father to preside over the tea-table

in the drawing-room ; and she would go to bed quite happy if she gained but a smile of approbation from her father, and a word or two of kindness from his friends. The child was growing up into the girl, rather shy and retiring, but perfectly self-possessed. She did not know much, but she listened attentively, and learned eagerly ; she had few opinions, but those she had were firmly rooted. She lived amongst men who had seen much of the world, and some of whom were talented, or highly educated ; and her taste for natural sciences, and for literature, began to develop itself.

The girl became, too, her father's chief ally—she kept his accounts for him ; she knew all the wine in the cellar ; to her steady hand the tired man could commit a bottle of old port ; she knew when to gather, and how to stow the apples ; and he ate no strawberries but those her hands

had pulled. She constantly claimed as a reward a day's rounds with him ; and she learnt to follow his habits of self-denial, and to endure, without complaint, and at last with impunity, his long fasts.

She learned tenderness and long-suffering towards the poor from him, for he was more often found in the houses of the poor than in those of the rich. He was deeply touched one day, when he had desired Vera to get out of the carriage and leave a little parcel at a cottage, whilst he waited for her. She knocked ; there was no answer ; she stood patiently, her father watching her. She knocked again gently, still no answer.

"Go in, Miss Harrison," said Tom, the coachman ; "or knock very loud."

"No, some one will come," she said. "I cannot go in."

An old woman came at last, and seeing



who it was that had knocked, apologised very humbly for keeping her waiting.

"But why, miss, couldn't ye ha' come in?"

"No, not without leave," laughed Vera.

"Ah! miss, there are few like you and the doctor, God bless him! You allus take account of poor folk—you never intrude, and you never see what ain't meant for you to see."

Tom did not like his horses being kept waiting; but Vera said, in answer to the pressure of her father's hand,

"You did not mind, papa—I thought I had no right to go in without being asked."

So in heart and mind was growing up the green herb, "though men slept;" and to the charge and culture of such soil as this, Dr. Harrison called in the service of Philip Lane, graduate of St. John's, Cambridge. Many and anxious had been his inquiries about

this gentleman ; carefully had he made himself acquainted with his character and position ; he had even gone to London, on purpose to see if he thought him suitable for his daughter's instructor. Vera was the difficulty—a well-educated, kind-hearted man would have been all that George required ; but for Vera much more was necessary.

How eagerly the children waited for their father's return from London, to hear something about Philip Lane ! George made the greater number of inquiries. " Was he tall or short, fat or thin ?—did he play at cricket ?—did he wear a tall hat and a white choker, or a slouch hat and knickerbockers ?—was he very stern and very clever ? " " Has he a kind voice ?—can he sing ?—and do *you* like him, papa ? " were Vera's more pertinent questions.

" He plays at cricket, and he loves

music; he wears probably a great variety of clothing; he can be kind, and stern too, I fancy," answered the doctor, to both his children; "and I shall like him if you do, and if he is good to you. In the meantime, it would be unwise to tell you any opinions I may have formed, for though one may certainly be prepossessed in favour of, or prejudiced against, a person very soon, it is never right to *trust* to first impressions; and certainly wrong to prepossess or prejudice another, so, like a prudent lawyer, I say to you, judgment reserved. Next week you can judge for yourselves."

"I think he squints, or has red hair," said George to Vera, as they went to bed. "The governor didn't want to frighten us. I only hope he won't be very cross. You'll help me sometimes, dear old sis, because I am so stupid."

"No, George, you're not very stupid, but

you're lazy sometimes. My idea of Mr. Lane is that papa likes him, only he does not say much, for fear you and I should think his swan a goose."

Vera laughed, and went off to her own room ; and George, as he tumbled into his little iron bed, said to himself, "Time will show ; but Vera is generally right. It's rather a bore her being a girl, else we might both have gone to school."

## CHAPTER V.

“CONFOUND this horrid climate!” muttered Sir Bertram Norreys, as he stopped his hasty and uneven walk up and down his library, and stood looking out of the deep bay-window across a wide sweep of park-land. Dreary and comfortless it looked. The Winter had broken up, and the March winds were late in coming to drive away the heavy February rain-clouds; the trees, all black, and bare, and gaunt, gave no promise of Summer glories, and the sheep, huddled together in knots, tried to keep each other warm. “What a fool I was to come down here at all! I should

have been much better up at the Alexandra. A parcel of nonsense to come and look after one's property! What do I care about it? —a wretched, dull place! And Julia said she would be down yesterday. I wish women would keep their word. Women! —they don't know what a promise means! And as for White, why could not he have brought his books up to London? An old prig of a lawyer fetches one over from Nice to England in the middle of February, and an ass of a steward has one down into Wiltshire into the bargain! Well, I suppose I had better stick to my work, and then I shall get quit the sooner."

Moodily he went to the writing-table, and turned over a heap of labour sheets and farming accounts, making occasional marginal notes in pencil; for he would master business, though he hated it. He came upon the names of fields, copses, farms on

the estate, and repeated them aloud once or twice, thinking of the time he had last been there, or the incidents connected with them, and the names of men who had held, or did hold, farms, or who worked at day labour. The latter he scrutinized most carefully, and sighed once, as if with a sense of relief. He went accurately through a mass of accounts, and read the list his steward had made out of repairs necessary, and alterations or improvements to be made. His hand and eye paused all at once, and he drew his breath hard, like a man who suddenly finds himself face to face with something he has tried to avoid. Slowly he laid down the papers, and said, in a very low voice, like one that fears to wake the dead, and looking into the room with piercing eyes,

“The Uplands Farm, new window-sashes, gates, and fencing! The Uplands Farm!”

Lower and softer came the words, the eyes kept their piercing glance, but gradually firmness and calm returned to the face.

Nothing in the room stirred ; the heavy cloth curtains hung motionless, the doors gave no sound, the pictures on the dark panelled walls neither frowned nor smiled one whit the more ; the fire alone crackled on the hearth, and the rain pattered outside. He rose and paced the room again, with hands clasped behind his back ; he spoke no word, but breathed heavily rather than sighed. Weary at last of his very restlessness, he threw himself into a chair, and sat there gazing moodily into the fire.

His thoughts came thick and fast, and with very little order in them, and the remembrance of his past life was like a flood surging past : his father's sternness and his pride in his boyish successes, his sister's pony and his own, moonlight nights in his mother's



garden, September and October days in the coverts, the whispers of the leaves in the woods, his mother's death, his father's displeasure, and the news of his death, which reached him when abroad; and over and under all wound a lithe form, clothed in green stuff, with a rose-coloured riband binding her fair hair.

“My wretched, wasted life!” he murmured; “all gone—not one of the old name after me! Fool! fool! God! how fair she was, and how I loved her! Love!—ha! ha! ha! Love! death and damnation! It is all over, all settled now; the game was soon played out, and I was not a winner, certainly. Love—an airy bubble for a child's play, a fiery sword for a man's hand. How idle this is! let the past be past! Nothing can mend it now.”

The fire gradually faded from his eye, and the bitter curl from his lip, and he sank

into a moody silence, which was broken at last by the noiseless tread of a servant, who gently threw open the heavy door, saying,

“Mees Norreys, Eccellenza.”

“Dearest June!” cried Sir Bertram, rising to meet his sister, “as welcome to me as the month whose name you bear; how long since you and I have met—and here!”

The tears stood in her eyes at the unusual warmth of his greeting; she laid her cheek against his shoulder without speaking.

“How good and kind of you to come to me, Julia! I should be bored to death here; and I fancy, from what White says, I shall have to stay a month or six weeks.”

She walked to the side-table, put off her seal-skin hat and jacket, and then returned to the fire.

“Dear Bertram, you have sat here till the twilight has come down on you; the room struck me as quite dark when I came in.

You men are such uncomfortable creatures—that is, when you are not bullying somebody, and insisting upon your rights and privileges.”

She stooped and lighted a cedar chip at the fire, and then passed her hand along the carved wooden mantelpiece, in search of candlesticks, which she found and lighted—curiously carved and twisted oak candlesticks.

He was watching her with half a frown and half a smile.

“How long is it since you were here, June?”

“Six years,” she answered, in a low voice.

“I was thinking,” he pursued, unmindful of her tone, “of the force of old habit and association; had those candlesticks been removed, you would have groped for them for an hour, so sure were you that they were within reach.”

"Yes, Bertram, we knew them all our lives. I never saw any others like them. Oh! Bertram, there are none left but you and me now. Arthur and Willie both dead, and then our father. How sad the world is!"

"I hate the place," he said, angrily; "why should one always be reminded of loss or sorrow? One reason I wanted you here is that you should see how wretched and lonely everything looks, and agree with my wish to let the house and gardens."

"Why should not you come and live here again yourself, and make a home for me, Bertram?" she said, with a sweet appealing look at him.

He never heeded the latter part of her speech, nor the look, but said, from his still angry heart,

"I live here! Good heavens! with the memory of my bitter youth always upon

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You men of the world—  
—that is, a man of the  
body, and a man of the  
privileges.”

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A deep angry flush passed over his face, and he grasped her arm as he said, hoarsely and rapidly,

"Love! What do you know of love?—with your delicate face and pure heart. And? Yes, fifty times, or never, which please. Do not the two expressions mean the same thing—to you? But I have not yet seen the woman for my wife; I have not seen the woman to sit in my place, to wear my mother's pearls, my gowns, my jewels, my arrears, of Avon Court. Enough, I am what I am—neither glad nor happy, but never quite inclined to me, and bear with me as I am. We are together—not for long, but never again. There is plenty to do and talk of. To-morrow I go to Salisbury, if the rain holds. Will you go with me? And now I must go to your maid; I suppose they

have put her in possession of your room. We shall dine here, Julia ; the little drawing-room is the only other sitting-room prepared. I thought we should be lost in the great rooms ; before you came I used no other than this."

Miss Norreys took her way through the hall, up the wide staircase, and along the gallery to her own room—the room that had always been hers. Her brother thought she would be pleased to occupy her old quarters, although the room was at some distance from his own, and he had the stairs and passages hastily laid with matting ; but she felt the desolate silence of the deserted house very keenly, and she did not attempt to go into any other part of it that night.

She had not been there since her father's death, six years before. He had died rather suddenly, when her brother was in

Egypt. He had never asked to see his son, and Sir Bertram had not returned to Europe in time even for his father's funeral. Julia Norreys had been at the Park alone, and left it, after a few sad weeks, with some relations of her mother's, with whom she had resided ever since.

Now, in her old room, which she had occupied from her childhood, with what tenderness she looked at all the articles of furniture—the bed, with its tented hangings of flowered *tournai*, the great wardrobe of oak, and the dressing-table of the same wood, with its carved border, and the looking-glass set into it, in its heavy carved frame, mounted with oak and silver sconces. She thought of her first county ball, and her mother coming in to see her dressed, and adding the last touches to the crown of dark hair that did not need the white jessamine stars to add to its beauty. She thought of the young hero



of her life, who had left his bones at Scutari, and whose memory had passed from almost all but her. The mere furniture remained, all that had been peculiarly hers was gone—every souvenir, every treasured relic ; yet in the casket lingered some odour of the sweetness it had held, and the threshold had been crossed by no other foot since she had left it.

The dinner was not very costly, but it was well arranged by the Italian servant who had accompanied his master, and the woman who occupied the post of housekeeper was a tolerable cook. Sir Bertram made no complaints, and spoke very little to his sister but of subjects relating to foreign art or literature. She had ever been in some awe of her tall haughty brother, and she suffered him to take the lead in everything that was said, as in old days at home he had done in all matters. Later in the evening Mr.

White, the steward, was announced, and Sir Bertram left his sister alone in the drawing-room, to go over the various matters of business he had already studied, and arrange for their being put into execution.

Carlo brought her some coffee and maraschino, as he was in the habit of serving them to his master ; he arranged some disordered articles in the room with his helpful Italian hands, gave Miss Norreys a half-respectful, half-friendly smile and glance from his dark eyes, and then she was once more left to her own resources. She was not an idle or helpless woman, but the cheerlessness and silence of the long-closed house oppressed her, and the books she had brought down did not suit her present mood. So she ventured to ask admittance to the library, and sat there till late into the night with the two men, who were deep in the consideration of tiles or slates for roofing,

and the question of cropping certain fields or laying them down in grass. She did not understand all these matters, but, when she could, she put in a quiet word or question, shewing that she was interested in her brother's property, and both could and would give sensible advice on such things as might fall within a woman's province. He was gratified, but by no sign shewed her more than that she did not bore or worry him. And she was of those who are content with the flowering of the aloe, and do not weary of the hundred years.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE morning broke tolerably fine, and Mr. White sent his wife's pony-carriage down to the Park for Miss Norreys' use. Sir Bertram had kept no horses there but the farming teams, and an old favourite or two that were ending their days in peace in meadow or straw-yard.

Sir Bertram smoked his cigar almost in silence, flicking sometimes at the pony's ears, but thinking of business, and how best to end what was a serious burden to him ; while his sister only watched the light and shadow flitting over the swelling downs, and remembered earlier days, that had had hopes and fears in them. Once or twice she remarked to him

the beauty of down or river, and pointed out signs of coming Spring ; but he shrugged his shoulders, saying that England was unendurable in the country, and London only satisfactory if one had hosts of acquaintances there, and was in a position to avoid them when one thought proper.

Arrived in Salisbury, Sir Bertram went to the bank and to his solicitors ; and Miss Norreys made some purchases, mainly for the sake of greeting civilly tradesmen with whom her father and mother had dealt. She got out of the carriage and walked through the market-place, down to one of the almshouses, where lived an old pensioner or two ; and then on to the Cathedral, where she had asked her brother to meet her. She was walking up and down under the leafless trees in the Close, when he came up and proposed that they should go and see Adams the organist before their return.

Sir Bertram had known something of Adams in his earlier days, and of his musical talent ; and when the appointment of organist had become vacant some years before, he used his influence to obtain it for him.

Miss Norreys sat with Mrs. Adams in her little drawing-room, asking various questions about people she had known when she was living at Avon Court ; and amongst other news she learned that Mrs. Harrison was very ill, and unlikely to recover. Dr. Harrison had been in attendance upon her own father and mother, and was a valued friend.

In the meantime, Sir Bertram, still smoking, walked with the organist up and down the sheltered garden, bright with snow-drops and crocys ; and after hearing of his life, prospects, and general well-doing, he said,

“ Well now, Mr. Adams, you can do me

a favour ; will you take charge for a few weeks of a young protégé of mine ? I fear I shall have to be at the Park another month ; he is only ten or eleven, he would be in my way and my sister's. You know I have no establishment there of any kind, and if you and Mrs. Adams can find room for him, and will take a little care of him, I shall be greatly indebted to you. I picked him up abroad," said Sir Bertram carelessly ; and tossing away the end of his cigar, he proceeded to light another. "I did not like to leave the child alone, and I brought him over with me ; and now it is rather worse to leave him in a London hotel—he will like the free country air."

"I shall be very glad, I am sure, to oblige you in any way, Sir Bertram ; and we will receive the boy when you please. Is he English ?—can he speak English ?"

"I hardly know what he is, nor what he

can speak," said the baronet hastily, "but he amuses me sometimes; and having taken him, I hardly know what to do with him, nor how to let him drop off. He can do nothing for himself yet—I mean in the way of getting his living. I suppose you will call him a gentleman; he has had some education in France and Italy from a foreign tutor, but he can speak English. I can only speak Italian enough to make my servants understand me. Then you will have him? Many thanks. You will let me know of course what are his expenses. I will send my servant to London for him to-morrow. His name is Beltran; he is a good boy enough, but hot-tempered."

"All Southern races are," said the organist.

"True," answered the other with a smile, "and I tease him sometimes. Now, good day; my sister is looking for me."



Carlo went to London, on business for his master, and the boy Beltran was lodged in the organist's house. The dreary, dirty, lonely days in London had sadly tried the boy, but in a little while he accustomed himself to the quiet ways around him, and even attached himself, as youth will and can attach itself, to the kind husband and wife. They felt he was a gentleman, as Sir Bertram had said, and his foreign education had given additional polish to his manners. He liked the organ, and the garden and the canaries, and occupied himself about these things, never going to any distance alone; he would read for hours in the cloisters, and come in with a sad, far-away look in his face, that troubled Mrs. Adams. She often wondered what was the story or sorrow of his life, but forbore to ask him questions, because he had been placed under their charge by a man who bore no good name for temper or justice.

Beltran talked to her often of the fair lands in which he had lived, and of the books and studies that had deeply tinged his character with romance ; he would surprise her often by quaint poetic thoughts suggested by, to her, every-day matters. Mrs. Adams was no less surprised at the fanciful imagery in which he described music that pleased him. But he never spoke of his private life, except in fits and starts, and then always with sadness in his tone, as if he had been the victim of caprices, and been treated with an uneven, injudicious hand.

One evening they were greatly struck by his manner. He had been in the organ-loft as usual, with Mr. Adams at the afternoon service, and had gone down alone into the cloisters; there he had seen Vera Harrison, and had brought her into the garden for violets, and Mrs. Adams had taken the little girl home. Beltran was leaning over the gate as she re-

turned, and she could see that he looked gayer and more smiling than he had done for some time ; she fancied the little girl had pleased him much. Just before she reached the gate, Sir Bertram and Miss Norreys drove slowly by, and the boy lifted his velvet cap.

“ Good day, Padrone.”

Sir Bertram gravely returned the salutation, but he frowned, and the boy's face flushed scarlet at his coldness, and he went into the house instantly. By-and-by Mrs. Adams called him down to tea, and she saw the traces of tears on his dark lashes, and a deeper flush on his cheek ; she said some kind words to him, and he suddenly dropped his head on her knees, sobbing, “ *Madre mia !*” and it was long before she could comfort him.

At last she said,

“ The little girl said her mother was

dying, and she was alone. Am not I alone? What father, what mother, have I? Why am I at all? If the Padrone will have me, why can he be to me cold—ay, cruel? Sometimes he will not speak, sometimes he taunts; sometimes he can be good and kind, if I have done anything well, and the flush comes in his cheek and the flash in his eye of pleasure. And I am a boy, to be a man, and I weep—do you despise me? Tears are for women, but my heart here will burst if I never weep.”

The boy sobbed convulsively, but struggled hard to recover himself.

“You will think I am a coward, Mrs. Adams—I am not. I wish I could show you I am no coward. Listen—I was with the Padrone once on the Mediterranean, and there was a great storm. The sailors were frightened. They prayed, they wept. I did not. I held on by the mast, and looked

at the wild sky and fighting waves ; and the Padrone came to me with pale cheeks and eyes like flame, and he drew me to him and kissed me, and said I deserved to be an English boy, and he was proud of me. He gives me no kisses now. I may be too old, but I am all alone, and have nothing but him. I would like some one to love me—a woman. You will love me a little whilst I am here?"

"Yes, my dear, that I will," said Mrs. Adams, and sealed her promise with a kiss. "And never do you think that a true woman thinks a man a coward because he has a feeling heart, and because he weeps when he is wounded."

Later in the evening, when Beltran heard the death-bells tolling in the city, he asked for whom they tolled, and was grieved to hear they were for the mother of the sweet child that had pleased him. He began

to talk of and ask questions about her.

“Her name even is so sweet,” he said, pronouncing it several times, and giving it the Italian accent. “If she grows like her name, what a good omen to have called her by it! Do you know she is—I do not know if it is pretty, but in my country a sculptor seeing her, would make some statue from her—he would call it Youth, or Spring, or perhaps by some flower’s name. Ah! I called her a flower myself. I thought she looked like a violet—shy, with dew-drops in its eyes, and yet that holds up its head. The Padrone will go back to Italy, I think—he could not stay here; and I will tell some one, when I am a man, how to make a statue like an English violet.”

Mrs. Adams thought such talk rather sentimental, but it did not disturb her much, and so she put in a remark or a question here and there, thinking it best not to check

the boy's recovered cheerfulness. By-and-by he said,

"This England—it is not nice when one is sad. It is cold—there is no sun—it rains. In Italy, if I am sad, when the Padrone is silent or unkind, I slip away out. It is warm—I lie under the trees and read—I hear the fountain in the garden. Sometimes it is night—the air is warm and sweet; the stars are so great; the night is grand, like a giant, not like a demon. I do not like the night here. I am sad there, but only sad; here I should die too. But the Padrone will not stay long—he does not love England either. I have heard him say here is no place for him—no one cares for him."

"And do *you* love him?" Mrs. Adams ventured to say.

"He will not have love—he will have me obey. Some day," and the boy's dark

eyes flashed—"some day he shall ask, and if I do not please, I will not obey. I do not like *obey*, except because I love. I will tell you," and he dropped his voice to a whisper—"the Padrone is grand, is noble, people look at him, they bow, they serve him, the English lord they say. I am not like that—he looks at me, and I look back again; he teases me, and then I am hurt, but not afraid; then he laughs a cold laugh, and says I am English too. Are the English hard and cold?—and do they tease because their country is so cold, and looks so black?"

Many such talks did the boy have, and unconsciously he was learning much. Mrs. Adams was a simple-minded woman, but she had a good heart and a clear head, and she spoke freely to him of needful self-control, and of the upright truthfulness that should mark a man's character. Gradually



he learned to like the sterling worth of an English nature, though hidden by a rougher crust than he had been used to see, and to perceive that in the aggregate the Northern character most accorded with his own, though in individual instances he shrank from it. As the Spring advanced, he began to find beauties in scenery and colouring. The colder climate strengthened him, and he took great delight in fishing with the organist, between whom and himself a silent bond of fellowship always existed. The boy began to play a little from study, and not merely from ear, as he had done abroad.

Beltran's days went on—if without much interest in them, at least without pain ; and in early youth every to-morrow seems to have its hope to bring, or its story to tell ; the possible becomes the probable, and the glory and mystery of life irradiate even un-

eventful days. The boy saw Vera once again; but she was in deep mourning, her head was bent, and he from the organ-loft saw only once the lifted brown eyes.

## CHAPTER VII.

SIR BERTRAM and Miss Norreys had called several times in the Close with kind messages for Mrs. Harrison, after they had heard from Mrs. Adams of her serious illness. Dr. Harrison they had known for many years, and Mrs. Harrison had come to Salisbury, a bride, a year or two only before the late Baronet's death ; but the two young women had liked each other, and Julia Norreys felt, when she heard of Edith Harrison's death, that another link in her life's chain had been broken.

Sir Bertram wrote and proposed to attend the funeral, and he said a few kind words

to the little sad-eyed girl that held fast to her father's hand.

Miss Norreys would fain have lingered on in the neglected place. Had it not been her home? Was it not nearer and dearer than any other spot could ever be? And now, as the Spring advanced, Nature herself hid, with gentle, flowery hands, much of the desolation. A few servants in-doors, a little money, some gardeners and a careful overlooker out of doors, with a little time, would make Avon Court fairer again than it had been since the mother's death.

But Sir Bertram was inexorable. It was nearly the end of April, and go he would. He had been round almost the whole of the property, the accounts were all in order, and he had seen all his tenants. This had been done as a stern duty by him, and no one greatly rejoiced to see the cold, haughty face of their landlord; besides, report gave

him credit for a stormy temper, which, coupled with the power of indulging it, is ever a cause of fear, dislike, and restraint in the minds of a man's tenants and inferiors. Perhaps, as usual, report somewhat erred; but Sir Bertram was not beloved, and he knew it.

"Well, June, I shall be ready to leave next week," he said one evening. "White is coming to-night for his final orders. I think I have been everywhere, and seen everybody, and shall leave all in train for some years to come. There is White now coming through the Park. Stay here, if you like, and hear all out. You have been very kind and useful to me, and I am more obliged than I can say. I had no idea you had so good a head for business."

She smiled.

"I am glad to have been of use to you, Bertram. At any time when you are away,

if you want anything done, I shall be too happy to serve you. Good evening, Mr. White," she said, as the steward entered. "My brother begs me to stay here again to-night and assist at your conference. I want rather to talk to you about some of my pensioners, and I have already asked Mrs. White to continue to be my representative."

"I am sure she will be very happy, Miss Norreys," said the steward, with a bow. "But happy is hardly the word to use, as we are sorry Sir Bertram cannot be induced to remain here longer. I have said all I have to say on that head," he pursued, seeing the frown gather on the Baronet's face. "Sir Bertram must be the best judge of his own actions. I can only regret that to my unworthy self should be left the charge of so fine an estate."

"We have really nothing to settle to-night, Mr. White. There is only Julia's

list for coals and flannel, and the schools. I promised to give something towards some fittings for the schoolmaster's house. Do help yourself; do you take port or claret? The cellars are not quite empty; but there is little else than wine and furniture in the house."

Miss Norreys finished her instructions, and then Sir Bertram said,

"Julia leaves on Monday, and I shall go on Wednesday at furthest; and I hope neither you nor Messrs. Walker will want me again for a long time to come. I do not like being here; still I cannot let the property go to ruin. You may let the house and gardens, White, if you can get a good offer; if not, no matter. Keep the place water-tight and aired. The woman who has charge now seems a careful body enough; she may as well stay. Don't let the green-houses go to ruin; they are ex-

pensive to build, but I don't want plants or gardeners. I may never be here again. When Julia succeeds me, she can do what she thinks proper. The farms will pay all necessary income and expenses. You have managed everything very well, White, hitherto, and I am perfectly satisfied. Don't write to me more than you can help, that's a good fellow. And now, Julia, give us some coffee," and the Baronet rose to go into the drawing-room.

"You have forgotten, Sir Bertram, you promised to go and look at the work done at the Uplands Farm; it looks very well now—it was sadly out of repair. You have been everywhere but up there, where most has been done. I should like you to see it."

"Ah! yes; you see, it is so far away," said Sir Bertram, with a flush on his cheek; "but I will try to get there before I leave,



though I should really think you would do as well," and without thinking he strode first into the drawing-room.

Julia Norreys' lip quivered a little, but she carefully avoided meeting Mr. White's glance, and in her faithful heart she said, "Bertram has never forgotten Lucy Martin;" and she wondered how much of the story of the Uplands Farm was known to herself, and to her brother's steward.

On the Monday following Miss Norreys went up to London, her brother promising to spend a week there before returning to Italy; she said she wanted him to take her to the Opera, and to the exhibition of the Royal Academy. She should enjoy such things far more for his companionship, and in a somewhat contemptuous way he believed her.

After he had seen her off by the train, he strolled idly along through the city, and

called at the organist's house, to tell Beltran he should take him away again on Wednesday. The boy said nothing for a moment, but his dark eyes filled with tears, and he laid his hand on Mrs. Adams' shoulder, and looked lovingly into her face.

"She has been so good to me! You will think of Beltran sometimes, *madre mia*? I like this England of yours, Padrone—I would live here in my own country, were I English."

Sir Bertram laughed.

"You do not know what you talk of, my boy; *addio* till Wednesday." Then, as a thought struck him, he turned again. "Beltran, would you like to see my home? Yes? Then I will send Carlo for you tomorrow quite early, and you shall spend all day with me. Good-bye, Mrs. Adams; many thanks for your kindness to the boy; he looks twice as well since he came to you.

I shall see you again before I leave." He lifted his hat, and walked quietly home to Avoncourt, smoking.

"When he is like that—when he smiles, when the frown does not come, he is grand, and then I could love him," said Beltran, watching the disappearing figure from the window. "His voice rings when he is pleased, and he is *gran signore*. Is he not handsome?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Adams—"very handsome, but stern, as you sometimes say; and I think he looks sad."

"Ah! we are all sad sometimes," said the boy, as he got down from the window. "To-morrow, then, I shall see his home. I have been wishing so much to see Avoncourt, but I would not say so. He says boys are inquisitive; he must not say that of me."

Beltran jumped out of his little bed

earlier than usual the following morning ; something new and strange was going to happen to him—his young heart gladly opened itself to affection, and his intelligence was awakening. When Carlo came with the pony-carriage, he ran down to the gate in a flutter of delight, and all the way to Avoncourt he chattered and laughed without ceasing. Carlo was a much more demure person, and did not nearly so highly approve of this England, and, having a wife in Naples, he was not unnaturally anxious to return to see her and the *bambino*.

Beltran was delighted with the sweep of the park ; the great trees grouped about it were beginning to throw light shadows on the grass beneath them from their rapidly-bursting leaves ; the masses of fleecy clouds driven before the wind sent their flying shadows over the green expanse. Lambs were sporting about,

and in little hollows, set thick with hawthorn-bushes, were growing bunches of primroses and violets; the winding river, too, pleased him, with four or five snow-white swans resting motionless on its deep blue waters. They crossed a bridge over the river, and came up to the front of the house. A double stone staircase led up to the entrance-hall, the doors of which stood open; and above them was the shield of the family, cut in stone for the chief of the house in the reign of James the First. The house was of brick, with heavy stone coigns, and the windows set in the deep wall had square Tudor mouldings.

Pleased as the boy had been, he did not run into that house, but mounted the stairs gravely; and, as he passed under the portal, he bared his head, and walked, with a certain grace that did not ill become him, into the broad-paved hall, round which hung

antlers and tusks, two or three rare stuffed birds, a spear, a sword or two, and a knight's helmet and steel gloves.

Sir Bertram was standing by the broad fire-place, watching with a pleased but almost anxious face the boy's demeanour; he was wearing a black velvet shooting-coat, with leather gaiters reaching to his knees, and held in his hand a black sombrero—for he had already been out. So much in keeping was his figure with his surroundings, that the boy, as he pressed up to him, slightly, and almost unconsciously, bent his knee, as he took his hand and kissed it. Intensely gratified was that proud bearer of a proud old name, and Beltran's quick eye and ear at once detected the presages of a happy day in the tuneful voice and smile that greeted him. After breakfast Sir Bertram told the lad he might wander all over the house—no doors were locked; that he might

look at what he pleased, but touch nothing, for he had letters to write, and in an hour they would go out together over the land.

Through the quiet, deserted rooms went Beltran, looking at quaint, heavy old furniture, at carvings in stone and wood, at the old pictures in the gallery, and the great drawing-room, standing sometimes at a window to look at the park and trees, and the lovely blue downland beyond. He had seen more gorgeous palaces in Italy, with more costly decorations and rarer pictures ; but somehow, here there was a personality and individuality stamped upon everything ; it was as if each article had been deliberately chosen by some one, and not by only one.

By and by he heard the sound of the whistle that was his usual summons, and he ran down to the library—the only room in the great house that did not look desolate ; one of the windows opened on to two

stone steps, and thence into the ladies' garden, as it was called—a pleasant sheltered spot, into which the little drawing-room also opened; the windows of the library had diamond-shaped panes, and a band of coloured glass down each side, and in the arch of each window was painted on the glass the Norreys crest—a gilded spur, and the legend, *Mount for Norreys*.

“Padrone, that is like your ring—your signet. I like that. In the old days knights and squires came trooping together to that cry. How warm the light strikes through the coloured glass into the room! I like it, oh! so much—your home! I thank you for letting me see it.”

Suddenly Sir Bertram stooped and kissed the boy's forehead, and then said, as if half ashamed of the feeling he had shown,

“Come along, Beltran; we must not dawdle here, if we are to get up into the



woods you want to see. You shall tell me as we go which picture you liked best, and anything else that has struck your fancy."

## CHAPTER VIII.

**A**CROSS the park went Sir Bertram, smoking, while the boy ran and chatted and sported at his side, down through the copses, startling a bird here and there—across a bit of common land full of rabbit holes, out of which, in late afternoon, would creep the little shy, brown tenants, to get a nibble of sweet young grass—through a farm steading, and down by the keeper's cottage, quite silent now, but for the yelping of a few dogs at the passing footsteps, and the crowing of the cocks as they strutted about in the sunshine. A gate—or, rather, barway—opened from the bottom of the keeper's

garden into the fir-woods. A long avenue of larch, already odorous with resin, and decked in early green, led into the thicker part of the wood ; a dense tall scrub, with some fine Scotch firs, standing out at intervals. The wood covered both the sides of a small valley, at the bottom of which ran a bright little stream, and became thinner where the rising ground stretched out towards the down. From the clearing at the top there was a charming view, and Sir Bertram threw himself down upon the short grass, and pulled his felt hat lower on his brows to gaze over the well-known scene. He lay there in silence for some time.

“Beltran, do you like this?” he said at last, in a gentler tone than he was wont to use ; “does it please you, my boy ? It is not like Italy ; and yet——”

“And yet,” repeated the boy, “I cannot tell my thoughts, Padrone—not yet. Ah !

I know it is the same difference as between the Madonna that the sailors in the Bay of Naples pray to, and the Madonna of Raphael—not so fair, but dear to them. I should love this so if it were mine, that I could never leave it.”

“But it is the order of things that one does leave the very thing one loves.”

“I do not understand,” said the boy, after a pause, and a wistful glance at the calm face that looked away into the distance. “Since you have been in England, you are different; abroad you are proud—here you are sad.”

“And which is best, Beltran?”

“I cannot tell to-day—to-day is by itself—to-day is happy. Padrone”—after a minute’s pause—“there is a picture in the gallery of a man with his hand on his sword-hilt, and he wears a breast-plate; his casque, with plumes, is on the ground at his feet—

is that by Vandyck or Titian? It is like you, but darker."

"He was a Norreys too—Sir John Norreys; the picture was painted by Vandyck—is it like me? I have sometimes thought, Beltran, it was like you. Does that please you?" he said, as he saw the bright flush pass over the lad's face, and he twisted round his fingers the dark brown hair that hung loose about his neck.

"All pleases me to-day," he answered, almost with a cry; "the whole world is glad—I think God is glad! Hark! there is a cuckoo."

"Yes; and do you hear the chime of bells far away? It is twelve o'clock; we must go down now, or your dinner will be cold; for people must eat, Beltran, even if they are happy."

The lad put his hand into his patron's, and back again down the woodrides they

went, through every sweet Spring sound,  
and athwart the light and shadow resound-  
ed in the child's heart, in deep undertone,  
"If this day could but last for ever!"

When they got to the keeper's gate, their  
approach heralded by the baying of the  
dogs, Mr. White, the steward, came forward  
from the kennels.

"Good morning," said the Baronet.  
"What a lovely day!"

The two men shook hands, and Sir Ber-  
tram was about to pass on, when the steward  
said,

"I wish you would come on, now you  
are so near, and have a look at the new  
farm-buildings. The Uplands has cost a  
good deal of money, and it would be a  
satisfaction to me to know that you do not  
find I have been over-doing the matter; you  
left the whole to my judgment."

"And I could not have done better,

White, I am sure ; but since you are so very anxious about it, I will go. Are you tired, Beltran ?”

“ No ; I could walk back into the woods again.”

The three went up the slope of the valley opposite to that on which Beltran had been sitting with Sir Bertram before. The Baronet talked on indifferent matters to his steward, but in his usual hasty and sarcastic manner ; but at every step he trod along the well-known path he kept saying to himself, “ Once more here, and with him !— what must be, must !”

In at the gate, through the little garden, and up to the porch. The farm-house was of timber and plaster, the beams showing out dark brown ; it was shaped like the letter L, forming two sides of a square, farm buildings and a wide gate completing the other two sides, with a paved court in

the centre, which formed a poultry-yard, where there were now geese and turkeys. Outside the farm gates, under a group of elms, was a great horse-pond, in which ducklings and goslings were splashing. The house was tiled, and had two steep gables. On the outer side of the L was the garden—a kitchen-garden, with a bit of wall and fruit-trees trained upon it, and close to the house a patch for flowers, and some old rose-trees climbing high up to the top windows—a comfortable home for a well-to-do farmer.

The Baronet stood at the gate, shading his eyes with his hand, and looking down towards the keeper's cottage, tracing out the path they had come, and seeing farther off the broad front of Avoncourt, and the winding of the river.

“You would not have known the place again, Sir Bertram, would you?”



said the steward, with some show of pride.

“Not known it!” cried the other, with such a voice and look that involuntarily Mr. White recoiled a step. Here certainly was the Norreys word-and-blow expression of which he had only heard before—the eyes were flashing, and the lips firm.

The Baronet was the first to recover himself, but he drew his breath hard as he knocked, and then lifted the latch. He spoke kindly, if coldly, to the farmer’s wife, and patted the two white-headed children; and putting some money for them into Beltran’s hand, he bade him stay with them in the big stone-flagged, oak-raftered kitchen, whilst he went over the house. Once inside, he went carefully through his duty of investigating repairs and alterations, expressed himself satisfied, and bidding the mother and children good day, he walked with Beltran out again into the sunshine, and strode rapid-

ly down the steep path, then, striking through a grove of beech, he gained an occupation road that brought them more quickly back to Avoncourt than the route they had taken in the morning.

So well was Beltran acquainted with his patron's moods that his pre-occupied manner and silence did not trouble him; but when they sat down to luncheon, he looked with surprise and pain at the ashy paleness of his face.

"Are you ill, Padrone?" he asked timidly — "are you tired?"

"Yes, tired, Beltran—no matter, it will pass away. Wine, Carlo—give me some Amontillado—I cannot drink beer to-day. The English Spring is trying sometimes—it has tried me to-day—to-morrow we shall be away."

He spoke with a tone of relief, and drank off a glass of wine hurriedly before eating.

He continued pale all the day, but to Beltran he was kind and cordial, and in the evening walked back with him to Salisbury, and then returned to his silent home, feeling keenly all its beauty, but congratulating himself that he should so soon be far away from the painful recollections it brought him.

"Your Sir Bertram is a very odd man, my dear, I must say," said Mrs. White, to her husband, across the tea-table. "He goes away to-morrow, and he has been here just once with his sister. I should have thought he might have called to wish one good-bye."

"A very odd man, certainly," answered Mr. White, thinking of the look that had appalled him in the morning. "I saw him to-day, and a handsome boy with him—an Italian, I think he said. We went to the Uplands Farm together."

"Indeed!" said she—"you got him to go

at last. There is some strong reason for his dislike to the place, depend upon it."

"My dear Jane, I think we won't have anything to do with Sir Bertram's stories—our place here suits us very well; and he is not a man it would be agreeable to cross in any way. He is very courteous to me, and expresses himself satisfied with me."

"I should think so," put in Mrs. White.

"He expresses himself satisfied; but we should not go on long together if we knew too much of each other, or rather if he thought I knew affairs of his that he preferred to keep to himself."

Mrs. White said no more, but retained her opinion that the Baronet was a very odd man. Perhaps she might have thought her husband still more odd, had she known that he carefully prevented himself from telling her what was often on his mind, and sometimes very near his lips; but his ap-

pointment was one that suited him, and he was a prudent man, and, with Hotspur, might have said to his wife,

“For secrecy  
No lady closer ; for I well believe  
Thou wilt not utter what thou dost not know.”

So he never did tell her that on his rounds through the estate he had heard that there had been a terrible quarrel between Sir Bertram and his father about the Uplands Farm—that they had met and quarrelled at the farm-gate when Sir Bertram was twenty years old, and was at home from college ; that old Martin and his sons had been turned out, some said—bought out, others said—from the farm, and had gone to Australia. And Lucy—Lucy with her pretty face and bright smile—what of her? Oh! she had gone with them, doubtless ; and very fit she was with her lady ways to take charge of an emigrant’s farm! Whatever the right or

wrong of the story might be, they were certainly all gone, and the farm had stood empty for some time ; but within the last three years an offer had been made to Mr. White for it by a stranger, who was now occupying it, and for whose benefit the much-needed repairs had been done.

So once more the Park gates were closed, the heavy bolts driven across the doors of the entrance-hall, and the windows shuttered ; the old housekeeper and her little servant aired and dusted the rooms from day to day as they thought needful ; Mr. White once more reigned supreme, and cloud and sunshine, Summer and Winter, chased each other over Avoncourt.

## CHAPTER IX.

“GEORGE! George!—get up! It is such a lovely morning, and Mr. Lane is coming to-day!” cried Vera Harrison, knocking repeatedly at her brother’s door, and getting no answer to her summons, she walked into the room.

George lay fast asleep, with his face pillowed on his open hand, and his fair hair tumbled about. Vera stooped and kissed him, and he woke with a start and shaded his eyes from the sunlight that was streaming into the little room.

“Get up, George! Mr. Lane is coming to-day.”

"Bother Mr. Lane! Is the governor down yet? What a desperate hurry you are always in, Vera!"

"Well, George, you know papa——"

"Oh! yes, I know you always agree with everything papa says. My word! don't you just watch everything he says and does!"

"Don't be silly, George—so do you. You know quite well there never was a papa in a book half so good as ours!"

"Yes," said George, sitting up in bed and rubbing his eyes; "but he is rather hard upon one sometimes. It's all very well for you—for you're only a girl, and his favourite into the bargain. You need not shake your head, because it's true—you ask Brand. But I'm not jealous, because you are a very good sister to me, though you do come and hunt me out of my bed long before I need get up."

"But we have so much to do to-day, you



must get up," persisted Vera. "We must look up all our books, and we ought to mend that map; and then I want to go down to Smith's shop for some pencils. You said you would go with me, and then take me up the river-banks to show me the water-hen's nest."

"Go along with you, then, and I'll get up. Don't you see how you are hindering me, stopping here?"

In half-an-hour George joined his sister on the terrace, where they walked up and down until the bell rang for breakfast; and Dr. Harrison, as he was dressing, looked out of his window at their two bright heads, and hoped he had done right for his children.

As Vera sat at the head of the table, pouring out her father's coffee, and giving her bright answers to his remarks, he watched her closely. He saw the

look of health in the rosy cheek and the clear hazel eye, and noticed the elegant make and careful fitting of the plain blue and white printed frock she wore; and he saw, too, that the brown hair which, till lately, had been cut short about her head, was tied back from her forehead with a blue ribbon, and fell in a thick waving mass below her shoulders, looking as if it had caught all the stray sunbeams of those Summer days, and he said, suddenly,

“I wish your mother were living, my child.”

“So do I, papa—but for your sake,” she replied, in a soft, low voice; “for me I have all I need.”

“But a mother’s care is so much for a young girl!”

“Oh! papa, are you not father and mother too to me?” Then, in a gayer tone, “And there is Brand, too, see what a pretty

dress she has made me, in honour of the new tutor !”

“ I was thinking, Vera, you were unusually smart this morning ; now I understand it,” said George. “ But I don’t suppose Mr. Lane will trouble himself about your frocks. You had better have been a boy, like me.”

“ Probably,” said the doctor, laughing ; “ but, for all that, a true man always likes to see a woman becomingly dressed—I do not mean smart, to use your word, George ; but Vera is not smart. I think her frock is only some cotton stuff, though it is very pretty.”

“ Just fancy the governor knowing what girls’ frocks are made of !” said George, when his father had left the dining-room. “ I wonder what he does not know ? I wonder if other fathers take as much trouble about their children ? I hope Mr. Lane will be nice, else it will be a bore for papa

to have him sitting with him all the evening when we are gone to bed."

Brother and sister went out together down by the river, to find the water-hen's nest, taking some luncheon with them in a little basket, for Brand was always lying in wait for her children, to see that they were not starving and had proper wraps; and they enjoyed nothing so much as a total disregard of hours, and, in Vera's case certainly, some disregard of costume. She always begged for clothes that should be as little as possible in her way.

"George says petticoats are such a bore, you know, especially when they are new and pretty."

On this warm, dry Summer day, and in prospect of the tutor's arrival, George did not object to the blue and white print. So fair and bright was the day itself, so delightful the pursuit of some green, gauze-winged

dragon-flies, so interested were they in the domestic affairs of more than one water-hen, and so cool and refreshing was the water to George's legs when he tucked up his trousers and pulled off his boots and socks to wade for a bunch of water-lilies and flags for Vera, that the time slipped past them unperceived, and it was only the sight of a boy carrying a letter-bag from a small village near that reminded Vera how late it must be.

"George, make haste and come out of the water ! There goes the Freeland's boy with the letter-bag ; we shall never be home by six o'clock, and papa said we were to be home before that. We ought not to have been late to-day."

"By Jove ! the governor will be angry. What shall you say ?"

"Say ! Why, that we forgot. It can't be helped now."

"But he hates us to forget, worse than anything."

"Never mind; come along. I daresay papa will be angry, and especially to-day, because he will think it so rude to Mr. Lane."

"I say, Vera," said George, in rather a low voice, after they had gone some distance too fast to talk to each other, "don't you think papa is crosser than he used to be?"

"Hush!" said she; but she nodded too, to mean yes.

"Are you afraid of him?" almost whispered George. "Could you be afraid of him?"

"No," answered she, stoutly. "Afraid! —no. Why?"

"You don't like being scolded, do you? I don't."

"Not when I deserve it," she said, with a laugh; "when I don't deserve it it does not matter so much, because papa has a right to say what he likes, and he is very fond of us."

George walked on silently, with a problem to solve. This sister of his had quite another way of looking at things from his own, and he could not but acknowledge that she had a certain cool courage which he wanted, though she was only a girl.

The first thing they saw when they opened the garden-gate was that Dr. Harrison was out on the terrace strolling up and down, with a stranger at his side. He turned coldly to the children.

"You will find some dinner on the table. It is probably cold ; we could not wait for truants," and he went on speaking to the fair-haired man beside him.

But Vera went up to her father and laid her hand on his arm.

"I am so sorry, papa, we are late, and it was so rude, to-day especially," casting down her eyes and colouring violently ; "but you must try not to be vexed with us, for we

did not think we were so late. I believe we were very happy out of doors, and forgot all about time, and it has been such a lovely day." Slowly she raised her eyes with a mute appeal in them.

Her father could not resist her pleading look, and said,

"Well, Vera, it was an unfortunate beginning for your acquaintance with your tutor; you will have to show him that you are to be more depended on than this, and now you have not a hand to offer him."

Poor Vera looked very confused at the kind grave face that was smiling at her; her hat was twisted round with purple loose-strife and convolvulus, and her hands were full of water-weeds.

"Let me shake hands with George, then, for both of you," said Mr. Lane. "Are you fond of plants? and do you like a day in the fields? You must take me down to the



river, and show me all the favourite places, will you?"

"Yes," said George, slowly studying the new face; he knew as yet no topic of conversation in which he could engage this curiosity, and preserved a discreet silence until his father sent him in-doors to have some dinner. Vera had escaped already, and rushing into the house she met Brand and Susan carrying some luggage up-stairs, both of whom burst out laughing when they saw her, and Susan exclaimed,

"Good gracious! Miss Vera, there's a guy you have made of yourself, to meet the new gentleman! Wherever have you been? and what a lot of flowers!"

But Brand hurried the girl off to her room to make her *respectable*, brushed out her shining hair, and tied a sweet white lily and a tiny leaf amongst its waves.

"Tea is ready, papa," she said, and stood

waiting on the library steps till the two gentlemen came up to her. "Now I may shake hands with you," she said timidly, and put her young frank hand into Mr. Lane's.

He looked at her and smiled. When he first heard that his elder pupil was a girl, he was very doubtful as to his fitness to hold so responsible a situation as that of her tutor, but when he felt the pressure of her hand he was re-assured. The hand was rather a large one, but it was shapely, and the grasp of the fingers was like the firm grasp of a boy; the smooth candid brow, the small head with its arched summit, set in such queenly fashion on the shoulders, the graceful, unrestrained carriage, and the look of health, and fresh air, and exercise, pleased him greatly. The education of such a girl might be, not only possible, but most agreeable.

In the drawing-room he watched her deft hands amongst the cups and saucers, and her quick eye, which anticipated every want of her father's. It was too late, and George was too tired with the long day out, for the children to get any occupation after tea; they sat together a little out of the lamp-light, until the servants came in to prayers. Vera never thought of making any alteration in their usual proceedings, and her father asked for none; but for a moment she hesitated, and her voice trembled when she began to sing, "*God that madest earth and heaven.*" George sang out undismayed, and by the third line Mr. Lane was adding a soft second to Vera's air.

"They are fine children," began Mr. Lane, when the two gentlemen were left alone, "they seem fond of each other."

"Yes, I think they are, but George is often loud in his laments that his sister is

not a boy. I fear you will find George idle, but he is good-hearted."

"And very good-looking, and strong. I daresay he is capital at cricket and football for his age."

Not a word about Vera, and yet she was the thought uppermost in the minds of both. The father could not bring himself to talk of his child, though his heart's darling, to this strange man, and he was harassing himself, as usual, with the terrible thought, had he now done right; while the tutor felt as if he should be guilty of impertinence if he named her. They drifted into some desultory conversation about books and authors, and then the doctor rose and said he would show Mr. Lane his room.

"We breakfast about nine o'clock. I am not very early; a bad habit, but very common in my profession. You may find the children down before that—certainly Vera.

To-morrow you can give them what orders you think proper on that head. I hope you will find all you want; ring, if not; my housekeeper is very attentive. Good night."

Philip Lane was very tired; and he was young, and he was rather pleased with the quaint and orderly household into which he had come. No wonder that he fell asleep and had no dreams.

In the morning he awoke, to find the sun arisen, and the early wind stirring the curtains of his open windows, and bringing sweet odour from the garden. As he awoke to the remembrance of his newly-begun life, he heard music, and became conscious that he was listening to the *Sonate Pathétique* of Beethoven—if not quite up to concert time, still played by a careful and nervous hand. He dressed in haste, and went down stairs, to find Vera sitting at the piano, deep in her study. Having satisfied herself

with her performance of a difficult passage, she broke softly into the beautiful Adagio, of which she was mistress, and played it with much feeling. After a little sigh as she turned the page, a sigh of pleasure, she went on to the charming windings of the Rondo.

“Good morning, Vera, and thank you for your music,” said Mr. Lane. “I would not interrupt you, till you were safely out of the mazes of that wood. You will play very well some day.”

“Shall I?” said she, with a glow of pleasure in her face. “I hope so. Sometimes I think I ought to play well, I am so fond of music.”

He was struck with the quiet and simplicity of her manner. She had not been startled when he came into the room, and now she was listening to his comment upon her playing quite impartially, as if he had spoken of a third person.

"You are fond of it," said he again ; " so am I. It was so pleasant, when I was dressing just now, to hear you. I hope you play every day?"

"Yes, always ; and since I have had no governess, I play in the early morning. Papa says he likes to hear me when he wakes ; but I play exercises when no one is near, because they are not amusing. If you will go a little away, I will go on. I may be a little nervous," she said, with a smile and blush ; "just to-day, but I shall not be nervous again."

She turned to the waggon at her side, and drew out a volume of Mozart's Sonatas, and played the one in F major, with a slow minor movement. He had never heard it before, and sat pretending to read a little behind her ; while she, almost unconscious of his presence, played on, until the breakfast-bell rang, and George burst into the room.

## CHAPTER X.

“ I WENT to your room just now, Mr. Lane,” cried George, after he had flung his arms round his sister’s neck, and administered a brotherly salute, “ and found you gone. I have been hunting for you everywhere, and never dreamed of finding you with Vera.”

“ And why not? May not other people like music as well as those who perform on any instrument? Besides, Vera can play.”

“ I suppose she can,” said the boy, who remembered certain wet days—days of childish sickness—that he had been obliged to spend in the house, when he had been



amused or soothed by Vera's music ; but he still stood and looked unconvinced at his tutor's face.

Vera smiled. "George does not believe in me altogether yet ;" and then all three went off to breakfast.

"And now, what will you do for me to-day? Have you any plans for yourselves?" asked Mr. Lane, when he was alone with his pupils, "because I am not going to work this lovely day. You must give *me* a holiday, and then, if you find I deserve holidays, you can give me some more at other times."

The children first stared, and then laughed. This was something quite new and unexpected. No grammars! no dictionaries! —here, indeed, was a model instructor! However, as they found the Fates propitious, they took their good fortune with the trustfulness of youth, and were only too happy

to initiate their new friend into their ways and fancies, and introduce him to their favourite haunts. At his suggestion, they got Brand to make ready their usual luncheon-basket, and he put a Greek copy of Homer and a volume of Scott's poetry into his pocket, and then they started away for cool green shadows under the trees and the river pools; he talked to them, read to them, listened to their talk and their often original, if sometimes foolish, fancies.

For some days things went on thus, and each day they wandered in a different direction, getting once as far as Stonehenge, in its silent, rugged grandeur. Vera said that the place always attracted her when she was away from it, and that, when she was there, it always saddened her, and in bad weather it would chill and repel her. Mr. Lane observed that Vera left George always to suggest, and usually to decide

upon their plans and proceedings ; but if they did not please her, or if he was undecided, a few quick words from her would speedily settle the matter. He was studying his pupils before commencing to lead them.

One day he said that George had chosen every excursion and every book, and that he did not know what Vera's choice would be. She coloured a little, and said she liked all he had read ; that all the walks they had taken were charming to her ; but when he persisted, she said one of her favourite haunts was the cathedral, but that was quite near, and they could go there in bad weather, and the other was rather far. Over at Avoncourt, she liked the park, the woods, and the neglected gardens. So that day they wandered about the desolate place, through the tangled gardens, into the green-houses, in which were only a

few climbing plants; and they looked at the shuttered windows, the empty flower-basins, the silent and moss-grown fountain. Vera pulled some hound's-tongue ferns from the arch of the bridge, but she was very silent all day. As they returned, George said,

"How did you first go there, Vera? I did not know you had ever been; and I saw you speak to the old housekeeper—how did you know her? Is she a friend of Brand's or yours?—for do you know, Mr. Lane, I think Vera knows all the poor people; and the poorer, and blinder, and dirtier they are, the better she likes them."

Both the others laughed, and then Vera said,

"I came here several times with my governess. She found I liked it, and when I was less naughty than usual, she sometimes brought me; and once the old housekeeper opened the painted window in the

library just as we were passing, and I stood to have a peep into the mysterious house, and she nodded and asked me to come in and see the Hall. It is so beautiful with armour and skins, and an inlaid pavement!"

"There now!" cried George. "Vera would make one believe it is quite an enchanted palace, and yet she has never said a word about it before! How is that?"

Vera looked down, and then said, slowly, "I liked the place, it is so beautiful to me in its desolation; and I was afraid you might laugh at me, and say it was horrid, and find out all its faults. I don't like to have the faults of things or people I like pointed out; I know where the faults are myself, I don't want other people to tell me." Then, putting her hand through Mr. Lane's arm, she said, "You like it, don't you? I think you understand all it might be, and see the possible beauty through the

mist of neglect. That is beautiful still; the river runs blue and shining, and the swans are mirrored in the water," and she turned and looked towards the house, as they walked across the park, threading the clumps of trees on the grass, instead of taking the road.

On the following day the children themselves suggested they had better go to their regular lessons; they had settled the matter between themselves, and then asked Mr. Lane if he had had holiday enough, for they thought they were not afraid of him, and could work now. And so it was arranged. Vera learned easily and rapidly, and there were no complaints of ungovernable temper; and George, though not so clever, by Mr. Lane's good management began to take pleasure in his lessons, and to understand the value of information. Perhaps the natural influence of difference of

sex operated, in Vera's case, to induce a rather headstrong girl to take the opinion and imbibe the instruction of another; besides, in her eyes, as well as in those of George, he was so unquestionably superior in every attainment, he had so truly mastered what he taught, that both children did their utmost to improve. George soon began to feel a little sort of worship for the tutor who was "such a man," as he expressed it, who was such an athlete, as good at play as he was at work, and who seemed perfectly acquainted with all the birds and beasts they met.

So time went on, and Dr. Harrison congratulated himself on the success of his new arrangements; he was ever a favourite, and spent many of his evenings from home, out at dinner, or at scientific meetings. His trust in Philip Lane increased steadily as he watched the progress of his children, and

the young tutor's conscientious exertion. Sometimes he had thought of marrying again, wondering if Vera might not be the better for a mother's care and watchfulness, and if she might not require a chaperon to take her into society; however, the only lady whom he could have preferred—the only one to whom he could have entrusted his child, a woman with soft, dark eyes and hair, of queenly stature, and a low, gentle voice, when she met Vera, did not like the girl. The father's quick observation detected the fact at once, and he forbore to ask her, whom he greatly admired and respected, to be his wife. Vera did not know for many years the risk she had run of not being her father's housekeeper and friend.

He was, as ever, loving to Vera, save for sudden and violent outbursts of temper, which increased with his years—from which George always fled, but which the girl



silently endured. He would grow enraged at foolish acts of carelessness or want of consideration, and then would lament his hard fate in being left alone—in being friendless. Vera thought, “Surely papa is ill?—going to be ill?” but the illness did not come, not yet; and she would stand silent till the storm had blown itself out, and then kiss his brow, and creep softly up to bed with a pale face.

Brand looked at her, for she generally tried to wait for her going to bed; but she did not often speak, fearing to do harm, and she took care that her room was warm, and that she wanted for nothing, for sometimes she trembled from the excitement of her father’s passion, as if from cold. In the morning after one of these storms Dr. Harrison would call his child into his library before breakfast, and hold her to his heart and whisper tenderest words; and Vera

always said to herself, "Papa will be ill. I don't know why; but I will never vex him."

Vera had another trial, of which also she said but little. She was teased by girls of her acquaintance on account of her education; she was a prig, a tom-boy, she could not do needlework, and she did not wear elegant dresses. Sometimes she felt this, and was worried by it, as one may be worried by the incessant onslaught of midges. Once or twice she had complained to her father and to Mr. Lane; but they had met her only with a laugh. In their superiority they had "cared for none of those things;" if a little girl was laughed at, it was no great matter. But Vera felt it very much, and she was not old enough to think out for herself the solution of the problem. George—and, as he said, some of his friends—laughed at or pooh-poohed her for being

only a girl, and her own friends rather snubbed her supposed want of knowledge of feminine affairs. More and more the girl withdrew into herself, finding delight in her books and studies, and depending for companionship on her father and tutor. They never failed or wounded her; and though as men, and much older, they could not entirely understand, and therefore did not sympathize with her emotional nature, she gained strength and self-reliance under their shadow.

Still her large and affectionate nature was not satisfied; she was too impulsive, too energetic, to live ever in the shade, and she would come out with bursts of enthusiasm and evidences of interest in others that startled them all. Her eyes would brim over with tears at a tale of heroism; at a tale of undeserved suffering she would clench her hands, and utter incoherent expressions of

wrath. No one could ask help or sympathy at her hands and be met with coldness ; so happy was she in the performance of any kindly act that she was told more than once by her aunt and cousins that she liked *patronizing* people. She did not understand why she seemed ever at issue with others, she whose ears and hands were always open. Even George, whom she helped in every way, and who made free use of her brains and her purse, seemed to take all she did for him as a sort of right, and to set little store by it.

One evening, in an unusual burst of rebellion against this apparent ingratitude or want of comprehension, she took her difficulty to Mr. Lane. He had long been trying to understand the bent of a character which had in it some curious contradictions. He let her talk to him and lay open her heart.

“Vera,” he said at last, “there comes a time when we all of us have to stand face to face with our own natures. There are many such times, I believe, for some of us ; at any rate, you have come to one of them. Do you understand the saying, ‘To spend and be spent for others’ ? Accept it ; it is your lot. Will you be satisfied with it ? Remember what our Lord said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ That does not apply to the giving of money alone ; you know there are a thousand things one may give of more value than that. God gave you this capacity for giving. Do not falsify your nature by complaining of it, or of any trouble it entails. Do not expect to fill two parts ; the giver cannot also be the receiver. Your joy, as well as your pain, must come from the same source. You have a high and courageous heart ; you are capable of sacrifice and endurance. What we *can* do,

that God puts us to do—that, in fact, is our nature, our character.”

“Ah! but is it not hard, sad, that one should be often misunderstood and laughed at? I have been told that I am vain and conceited, because perhaps—only perhaps—I know some things that other girls don’t know. I am not pretty, as the Webbs and the Merediths are. I have nothing to be vain of and conceited—I don’t think I am. Sometimes I think,” and she pressed closer to him and laid her fingers on his arm, “I would rather be loved than be clever.” The voice had dropped very low, and he saw tears hanging on the brown lashes.

How was he to comfort this girl? What was he to offer her as a defence against her own weakness? Presently she said,

“Don’t you see how alone I am? I have no friends but you and papa. Once or twice I have admired people so much. One lady,

a long time ago, I was very fond of—she was lovely, and I used to look at her, and make little gifts for her; but I was only a child, and I think I bored her. She married three years ago. Then I like different sorts of books, and poetry, from those which other girls I know like; and I like to be alone best—but then not always to be alone; and they laugh at me for being romantic. Must I always be alone, and always misunderstood?”

“Did you not say just now your father and I were your friends?—he is always with you; and you may count upon me, Vera, for what I am worth. I will not fail you.”

“But you will have to go some day; and when you get your Fellowship, you will be such a great man, you will forget——”

“Child! child!” he began.

“Very likely,” said she, hastily interrupting him. “But it seems to me that those

you like best, and do the most for, fail you and hurt you. I am always being hurt."

"Did Athens *understand* Socrates?" said he gravely. "Was he not poisoned? Did the Jews *understand* Christ? Did not the Gadarenes bid Him depart out of their coasts? Was he not crucified?"

Slowly the two had been pacing along the terrace in the moonlight, in one of the first warm days of Spring, when the air is laden with balm, and the thrushes sing an even-song. He knew that she was weeping, but he loitered there, to give her time to recover herself. By-and-by she laid her hand in his, and wished him "good night;" and he felt that the time of her childhood was past, and she had grown a woman; while there came over him the remembrance of a Summer evening, nearly two years before, when she came through the garden, a child, crowned with flowers.



## CHAPTER XI.

“CAPTAIN HARRISON,” announced the servant, opening the door of her master’s study, and admitting the gentleman, to the doctor’s astonishment.

“God bless me, Frank, what wind has blown you here? I thought you were in Spain.”

“So I was,” he replied, shaking the doctor warmly by the hand; “but I have returned nearly a week now. I suspect time does not fly so fast with you as it does with me—something to do every day, and hurried from one place to another to do it. However, I think it’s an even toss-up which

of us is the more usefully employed. I do my best to inform their minds, when they have any minds to inform ; and you to mend their bodies."

"And minds too," put in the doctor. "Always remembering your very proper clause, when they have minds to mend. Now that you are here, I hope you will stay a little."

"Well, I brought a portmanteau with me, though I hardly know what is in it. I brought some curiosities for your children, and some odds and ends for you ; and then there is a book full of sketches, but I told Molly to find room for some socks and shirts—if she could not, I shall make a raid upon your wardrobe. And where are the brats?"

"George is gone down town with a message for me, but Vera is about somewhere."

"And how does the tutor go on? I

thought that was a risky arrangement of yours when Molly wrote to me about it, but she said, when she saw Vera last year, she seemed much the same girl as ever."

The doctor laughed.

"The leopard cannot change his spots. But I consider the tutor a success; George is wonderfully improved, he finds it possible to work and play too; and Lane is a very nice young fellow, I have never had a word with him, and he is attentive and gentleman-like."

"And Vera?" asked the captain.

"Oh! Vera is very fond of him; they are great friends."

"The devil they are! I doubt not Miss Vera is clever enough to learn all she needs to learn, but perhaps, too, a few things she had better not."

"Vera is a child," answered Dr. Harrison gravely; "don't jest on this matter, Frank,

if you love me; the one object of my life is to do what is best for my children, and to you I must tell the truth. Vera is the joy of my life. I have suffered great anxiety on her account; sometimes I think it has told upon my health. I am often irritable beyond all belief; but I have no real fear about Vera—there is an uprightness, single-heartedness, and almost boyish independence about her, that will put her beyond ordinary peril. Let us come and find her.”

He opened the glass doors on to the terrace walk, and the two brothers strolled leisurely through the old-fashioned garden.

“I suppose you are fond of this place, George? I do not think, after my knocking about, I could settle down to quite this sort of thing; and yet sometimes, when I come back to you here, I fancy this must be more like home than Molly’s notion of the house in Brighton; she is not tired of the place,

and talks of its advantages, and air, and cleanliness, but after a short spell of it I always find I have something to do elsewhere. What beautiful anemones!—are they Vera's?—and what lilac!"

"Yes, Vera is as great a gardener as her poor mother was; and now she has Lane as right-hand man, she is quite a florist. See, there she is!"

At the bottom of the garden was an open turf space, which the children called the gymnasium; on one side was a locked summer-house, which held their garden tools, and bats and sticks, and in the centre was a trapeze; the swings were fastened back, and close to this stood Vera now, soft shadows from the young foliage of the trees falling across her figure as she lightly sprang to and fro with a foil in her hand, now parrying a thrust from Mr. Lane, now making a hit herself.

“*Un, deux, en avant !*” cried the captain ;  
“a hit, a very palpable hit !”

Vera dropped the point of her foil, and turned round with cheek and eye bright with exercise and pleasure, and then ran up to her uncle and kissed him.

“Very good indeed, Vera, I make you my most respectful bow. I suppose this is part of Mr. Lane’s curriculum ?”

“Don’t laugh at me, Uncle Frank, there is no reason because you are a soldier that you should laugh at my playing with weapons. I know your military sword exercise too, but you want an enemy before you to enjoy that thoroughly ; I like fencing almost as much as waltzing, I think. Come and see the armoury.”

The girl linked her arm though her uncle’s, and led him down through the gymnasium to the summer-house.

“This is the Armourer-in-chief, Captain of

the Guard, head of the War Department," said she, laughing and introducing Mr. Lane to Captain Harrison, as they went inside.

"This is a sanctum, or a rubbish-hole, according to whether you take our valuation of the premises, or that of some of our friends and neighbours. At any rate, I do not think you will find a place of its size so full of natural curiosities; the key to the collection being found in the wonderful similarity of taste in general matters, and dis-similarity in particulars, between George and me. For instance, those are George's horrors," pointing to some skins and skeletons of beasts and birds; "and these are my beauties," pointing to a rough case of butterflies, and a folio containing some dried plants; "but all the objects we collected between us. And this is the armoury."

The captain burst out laughing. Ranged round the room were a cavalry sword, a

court-dress sword, a sailor's cutlass, foils, single-sticks with basket-hilts, bats, balls, bludgeons, a life-preserver, a knuckle-duster, a couple of swords, sundry swords of various sizes and nations in wood, two muzzle-loading muskets, a pair of holster pistols, some bows and arrows, and two spears.

"Good Heavens! child, what do you do with all these wonderful machines? If you were in the west of Ireland, they would search your father's premises for concealed arms—perhaps swear you were all Fenians; and a Fenian band would not do amiss for themselves in gutting your quarters. They really could add nothing of offensive armour, unless it were a pitch-fork and a sickle. Ha! ha! ha! Where in the world did you pick them all up?"

"George bought some, and I chose the others," said Vera, with a great colour in



her cheeks; "but I assure you, Uncle Frank, they are very useful, and, you see, they are all in order."

The captain laughed more than ever, and made a mental note that his brother was certainly right in saying that Vera was a child; and as he looked at the bright, honest face, he could not help stooping to kiss her, and saying,

"Quite right to stand up for your household gods, Vera. I like you none the worse for it, my child—it is a thoroughly British sentiment; people do not care half enough for things now-a-days. It is rather refreshing to find a bright little woman like you. Stand to your colours, and be fully persuaded that there are colours to stand to. I am going to stay a few days with you, and if Mr. Lane will admit me, you shall put me through my old paces, and make a boy of me again."

Captain Harrison was a shrewd man, and had seen a great deal of the world ; and though he had some of the prejudices of his order, he had also that childlike simplicity which makes instinct or intuition—which is the right word?—a better judge than reason, so called. He very soon endorsed his brother's opinion that Mr. Lane was a success ; he watched the happiness and heartiness of the children, and he saw that classical studies had still left Vera a gentle and refined woman ; that the influence of her tutor was beneficial, that her friendship for him was perfect, and that no thought beyond had troubled her. The waters of her heart were yet asleep ; the white dove peace brooded there undisturbed. All her intellectual powers were in play, increasing day by day, and carefully nourished.

“ Vera is a better musician, I fancy, than my girls,” said Captain Harrison one even-

ing. "Lane does not play, does he? Where did you have her taught, George?"

"Adams, our cathedral organist, has taught her. He thinks highly of her talent, I know. Lane only thrums a little, but he understands something of the matter, and he induced me to let Adams teach her. Sometimes Adams comes here, sometimes she goes to him. She is having some organ lessons now, which are a great delight to her."

"And Lane does not object?"

"Object?—to what?"

"Oh! some teachers are so jealous, they must do it all themselves, or all their own way. He does not seem to have tried to keep all the power in his own hands."

"On the contrary, wherever he thought another could do the work better than himself, he has said so. I heard him one day, some time ago now, gravely talking to Vera on the necessity and honourableness of

needlework. I think the child had rather despised it, and Brand had found fault; but Lane pointed out to her the great power of usefulness that it gave, and the matter was settled. He must be leaving us soon. George is going to Winchester. I hope Lane will get his Fellowship, and then, when George goes up to Cambridge, he can take him in hand again. Vera does not learn lessons now, except some German, perhaps; she reads with Lane when she pleases. He is coaching George principally, and I fancy he has done his utmost to give Vera every resource possible, for she will be lonely when they are both gone."

"Hum! I see; he is a look-a-head sort of fellow. I suppose she will miss him. But you are always here, George."

"Yes, but much from home; she must be left to herself a great deal, and her friends are few. Sometimes I think I ought

to have married, Frank, if only for her sake."

Dr. Harrison sighed, and there came over his face that indescribable look of perplexity which his more decided and easy-going brother knew very well, and avoided, because it always foreboded a long and involved argument over every point and action of his previous life.

The Captain rose and stretched himself, looked out of the window, and asked if his brother was going out. Being answered in the affirmative, he went off to learn from Brand where Vera was, as he had not seen her since breakfast-time.

"Down at the organist's!" he repeated to himself, when he got the information. "George lets this girl do what she likes, and go where she likes. I wonder if he is justified in giving her so much liberty? She would not be fit for just anybody's wife, though she is a dear, good girl."

Possibly not fitted for "just anybody's wife," but perhaps all the more fitted for the one man in the world, if she were fortunate enough to find him, who would really suit her.

Now it so happened that, on this very afternoon, Vera's thoughts had wandered into a channel something like that which her uncle's had taken; and having finished her music-lesson, she walked out into the organist's garden with him, as she often had done during the past Winter, for it was a warm, sheltered spot, and he was a simple-hearted man. She delighted in talking to him about his art, on which he always grew warm, for he had given up for it business that had made his family rich; and this day he had been telling her that Sir Bertram Norreys had obtained his present appointment for him, and her thoughts had reverted to the silent, neglected demesne. She

made some remark about it, and he rejoined,

“It is said that Sir Bertram, then Mr. Norreys, was once desperately in love, and was disappointed; he was ever a headstrong, passionate man, and he quarrelled with his father about this, and, it is said, made a vow he would never live on the property again. My life has been so fortunate, so peaceful—my love is my wife, and my wife is all goodness—that I feel for people whose lot has been evil. You are but young yet, Miss Harrison, but I hope you may have the greatest happiness that life can give. I have thought,” he went on, meditatively looking on the ground, “that you have capacities for sorrow; something in your eyes, something in the tone of your voice, something in the way you pronounce your music, is sad; and yet my wife says you are the most cheerful creature she knows.”

"Yes?" said Vera, half interrogatively, half in answer; but she said no more, and presently sat down on the bench, with the sheet of music she held laid on her knee, as if for study. There the organist left her, and there her uncle found her.

"Come and walk with me," he said. "Have you forgotten you promised me a walk to-day?"

"No," she answered; "but I was thinking."

"Of what?"

"Of people's lives, and how sad they are; and how few people try to make others happy." And then, feeling that she was speaking with an unusual amount of emotion, she coloured violently, and was silent. "Let us go to Avoncourt," she said, in a few minutes, in her natural manner.

"With all my heart, if it is not too far for you."

"Oh! no. And I want you to see the



Hall, and the beautiful winding of the river. It is my favourite walk, but I never bring any one here except my great friends. It is so neglected that people might not like it, and there is no need to hold up one's precious things to discredit. I should hate to help by any stupidity in desecrating the altar at which I worship."

## CHAPTER XII.

“**N**OW, Uncle Frank,” said Vera, as they walked along, “I want you to promise me something—it is, not to laugh at me. You have been kind enough to ask George and me to come and stay with you ; but please don’t laugh at me. Isabel and Marian both think me odd enough, so don’t you add to my evil repute—at least, don’t laugh before other people. Sometimes I defend myself too warmly, and then I am rude ; and sometimes I cry, and then I am silly.”

“I will try to remember, because I want you to enjoy your holiday ; and I think

you will like Eastbourne. Our house at Brighton is to have some painting done to it, and I had a fancy to go to Eastbourne. Some friends of mine are going there this year—it is a quiet place, with pretty walks ; and you and I will have some boating, if other people are afraid to come. And then I may laugh at you a little when we are alone.”

“I suppose I must resign myself to my fate. But I give you fair warning—I do not like it ; and when I do not like things, I do not behave what Brand calls ‘ prettily.’ What a bore it is to have a tell-tale face ; and it is worse still to like and dislike very much. One’s feelings are then always uppermost, and one offers so many points of vantage to one’s enemies.”

“Enemies!—a kind little girl like you can surely have nothing but friends.”

“Friends!—I don’t know that I have more than I can count on the fingers of one

hand. But enemies is rather a fierce word to use. There is a long distance between friends and enemies. But, Uncle Frank, I think the people who dislike one, or who have little spites against one, in so-called polite society, are bitterer foes than those you soldiers meet in battle."

"Quite agreed, Vera. We soldiers often admire and respect our foes immensely. But, my dear, commend me to, or rather defend me from, the little spites of your sex. Men quarrel with a reason, and have done with it."

"You can know nothing about that matter. Women rarely quarrel with men; brave men never quarrel with women," cried the girl, with flushing cheek. "It is the natural order of things. It is left for women to quarrel amongst themselves, and they have not your good manly 'reason,' as you said just now; and that is why there are so many little spites that do not clear

away. Half of us are taught only how to keep a fair outward seeming. I am not proud of my sex, and wish often I had been a man."

"So do I wish you had. But never forget that there are good and brave and honest women, and that you may be one of them."

"With God's blessing," said Vera, softly.

"I do not suppose you will harbour many little spites; but, on the other hand, do not allow yourself to become cynical or satirical—it will not make you happier. I know you have an immense amount of that masculine quality, justice, and that you will be hard upon yourself, as well as upon others; but learn, with all your other learning, not to be hard. Hardness can never bring happiness to ourselves or others, and is not happiness what we all seek and require? Not but that I admit we do not all seem to

find it, and take miserable stones for bread——”

“Yes, we do all seek happiness, in whatever form we clothe that name,” interrupted she; “and we do not all seem to get it. Is it that we fail in our purpose and grow weak, or that our ideal has been a false one?”

“Hardness, yes, it belongs to the young,” pursued he, scarcely heeding her interruption. “The young, ever in haste; when we get older, we have time and its experiences to teach us that we are what we are, and, judging by ourselves and our own shortcomings, we make allowances for others. We do not expect to right things all at once, nor do we quarrel with what surrounds us, but try—that is, those of us who are good for anything should try—to support the weak, and encourage the strong.”

“What a problem it all is!” said Vera,

following out the thread of her thoughts —“the desire for happiness, and not finding it! There must be some solution; the desire has not been earnest—people have been caught by side-winds, and drifted out of their course, or the ideal has been false? What, then, is happiness? It is something like Pilate's question—what is truth?”

“What is that about truth, Vera? It is ‘as true as death,’ as the Highlander says, that we find ourselves in a very crooked world, and have to make the best of it; and everyone of us has to settle with himself what is ‘the best.’ We may oil life's wheels for one another; but, after all, we must each ‘dree our ain weird.’ And now, what has made you a philosopher all at once, Vera? I always had a notion you were like a foam-bell, or a butterfly, living in the breeze and the sunshine.”

“Had you?” she said, with a little sad smile. “A soulless thing is charming to contemplate from your exalted station, but I *feel* deeply enough to believe that expression in the book of Genesis, ‘Man became a living soul.’”

They had already entered the park, and Vera ran forward a little, and leaned over the bridge to pull some ferns and recover her composure. They went on into the neglected garden, and the girl gathered a handful of flowers from the overgrown bushes, and then sat down on the basin-rim of the silent fountain to bind them together. As she sat there, the old housekeeper came out upon the step from the open window of the library, and Vera went to wish her good day.

“Come in, Miss Harrison, do ; I haven’t seen you this long time. I’ve just put on the kettle, and can give you a beautiful cup



of tea in a minute. Do step in, miss, if you don't mind the servants' hall."

"Thank you, I should like some tea so much! Will you come, Uncle Frank?" but without waiting for his answer she was gone, and following the old woman through the house.

They went into the big kitchen, where the fire was reduced to its smallest dimensions. A clean deal table near an open window was spread with cups and plates; and two or three sturdy children were standing about, with very red faces and hands, the little servant having just rubbed and brushed them all in readiness for their tea.

"My grandchildren, miss; they are over here with me for a day or two. But their noise, maybe, will worry you—it does me sometimes, so I'll bring your tea into the servants' hall—or, maybe, you would have

liked Betsy to bring it you into the garden."

"Not at all, I shall have it here with you; I do not mind the children a bit, and if they are shy I will not look at them," said Vera, sitting down on the form by the children, and pulling the youngest down beside her, with whom she was soon on confidential terms; the only two of the party that evinced any shyness were the eldest boy, and Betsy, the little servant. The boy could not eat his share of thick bread and butter, for staring at the young lady who did eat hers, and Betsy was taking accurate note of the pattern of Vera's gown, and admiring the beautiful hair that rippled like sunshine down her back. Captain Harrison came in presently, and, leaning against the door-post, watched his niece.

"You had better have some, Uncle Frank, it is so nice," said she, giving him a little friendly nod; "home-made bread,

new ; Brand won't let me have any. Johnny, take that plate to the gentleman."

But Johnny was still too much engrossed in staring, and Betsy, though she heard the words, somehow did not understand them, so Vera jumped up and offered him some bread and butter herself ; and he, too, entering into the humour of the moment, gravely ate one of the thick slices.

The old housekeeper proposed to show the gentleman the house ; while Vera remained where she was, and played " Puss in the Corner" with the children till her uncle came back for her.

On their way home they met two of the gardeners ; the old man said, "Your servant, miss," and touched his hat, and the young one blushed with pleasure when Vera wished them a kind good evening with a smile. As they neared the city, a little girl crossed the road, and making a curtsy,

"If you please, miss, I have been down to your house, and you was out," she said, "but mother sent her duty, to tell you that my sister is badly scalded ; she upset the kettle on herself, and if you would step round to see her, you might quiet her."

"Yes, Polly, I will come. Go home, Uncle Frank, and tell papa I shall not be back to dinner; I must go with the child, she is one of our Sunday scholars."

"But it is getting late, and you are alone!"

"Alone—oh, yes, I am often alone here ; everybody knows me, I go out so much with papa, and I am never afraid."

"I had better go with you—or shall I send Brand?"

"My dear uncle, you would only be in the way; I will come home when I can. I like poor people," she added, smiling.

Dr. Harrison was dining out that evening,

and the captain was left alone with Mr. Lane. He proposed that they should walk down for Vera ; naturally the captain spoke of his niece.

“ I have been abroad some time. Vera strikes me as greatly altered in these months ; she is a very odd girl.”

“ Is she ? People who are always together do not so accurately note others as those who see them at longer intervals ; she is changed, too, from a child into a woman, and perhaps she has quite her own share of thoughts, and at her age these must be somewhat crude. Is she improved ? I hope so.”

“ Improved—oh, yes ! but it was the difference in her character that struck me. I may have been wrong in my estimate of her real character, though. Do you call her clever ?”

“ Yes, certainly, if you mean apt and quick ; she has had too much to do ever to be learned, and she has long spells of idle-

ness—at least I should have called it idleness in anyone else. I know better now, it only means a period of rumination, but her peculiarity is her versatility.”

“An awkward point in a woman’s character, when it comes to a question of love or marriage.”

“Just so; but she is true as steel to her friends, and her mind once decided as to her lover, she would stick to him too.”

“Then she is undecided? Well, her father is so; and a quaint contradiction it is in him, with his orderly habits, his knowledge of science, and his enforced decision in medical opinions, to be in every-day life so curiously vacillating and undecided.”

“It is one of the contradictions we see. Now-a-days, with our high pitch of civilization, and the many-sidedness of life, we can hardly find a perfectly direct, straight-lined character. Single ideas no longer

exist, and characters have become complex. But Vera is very decided. George calls her 'Very' constantly, 'from her superlativeness,' he says. Her perceptions are good, her observation accurate, and her decision follows at once; impulsive she certainly is."

"Positive, not superlative, I should have said. She is coming to stay with us. I wonder how she will like it? Mrs. Harrison and my girls have taken life from a very different point of view. How the circumstances in which we find ourselves mould us!"

"Vera will be very happy if they are as kind to her as you are. She is not positive in an offensive sense, and is quite content to waive her own views and opinions, but she will hold them still; only if goaded does she express herself excitedly."

"My brother gives her great freedom;

she does what she likes in most things, I fancy. Is he right?"

"In her case I should say certainly. But only within certain limits is she as free as you suppose; she knows perfectly well what he likes and dislikes. Dr. Harrison is even stern on some points; and I never saw her wilfully offend him."

Vera was just leaving the cottage when they reached the door, and she promised the mother to come next day and see the child. She passed her arm through her uncle's, and walked some distance in silence; at last she said,

"The poor little thing is badly scalded, but the doctor has hopes of her. She was screaming so, and would not let them touch her; that was why they thought of sending for me; she is fond of me. And much good I was! I am so ashamed; but I could not help it. The doctor began to dress the



burns on her chest and arms, and I said I would hold her. So I did ; but as soon as it was over, and they laid her on her bed, I slipped off the chair where I had been sitting, on to the floor, quite giddy and faint, and they had to lay me down and give me some camphor. I soon got better, but I was so ashamed ! Suppose I had slipped down with the child in my lap ! Much good I am in a sick-room, and not able to see people's hurts ! I think I shall get papa to let me have some training at the hospital ; I daresay he could get me admission."

"It was only your nerves, Vera."

"Yes, so the doctor said ; but then one must not have nerves."

The two gentlemen exchanged a smile, and she went on :

"The child is asleep now. I talked to her, and sang her a hymn when I was better. She grew very drowsy. I suppose

she fancied she was in school, for she began to say the Nicene Creed in a little whisper, which you could hardly hear when she got to the words, 'I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.' I hope she won't die. I think her mother thought it a bad sign, but she is fast asleep now."

## CHAPTER XIII.

HOW enchanting was that Summer day's journey to George and Vera, as they rushed along the South Coast Railway!—they pointed out to each other church-spires nestled in trees, and quiet little villages—and protested that, if they came to such another picturesque spot, out they would get, and explore it, leaving Eastbourne for some other time—and with what interest they watched the rough, weather-beaten sea-faring folk, and listened to the Sussex accent!

They were going from home alone for the first time in their lives, and were

both bent on enjoying themselves to the uttermost. To every young and healthy nature change of scene must offer many charms; and this holiday presented itself to the Harrison children in all the glowing colours of fresh air and freedom. Vera had been in London for a day or two with her father on one occasion, and both she and George had been at Brighton; but neither of them liked Brighton—it was too gay, too idle a place—too much of a town, and their aunt's house was not pleasant to them; they were always expected to be on their good behaviour, and were constantly being “set to rights.”

Brand, too, had gone to Brighton with them, and Mrs. Harrison had an idea that she was considered too much by her brother-in-law, and in many little ways contrived to put slights upon her, so as to make her feel she was “only a servant.” A

smaller-minded person might have resented this, but Brand took it very quietly, and went on doing her duty ; which conduct, perhaps, only added to the feeling of annoyance in Mrs. Harrison's bosom.

It had been originally proposed that Brand should go with Vera on this visit to Eastbourne, but the girl herself objected to it, saying that her father would be too lonely ; and though Brand felt being parted for the first time from her charges, she was rather glad to be spared continual little mortifications.

"I often wish we were rich," said George, as the train bore them on their journey—"what a lot of jolly things we would do ! We would have a house to ourselves, and then Brand could come and enjoy herself, and the governor need not be always stopping at home."

"I think we are rich enough," Vera re-

plied. "I am sure I have nearly all I want—have not you?"

"Yes, pretty nearly. It was very good of the governor to give me this watch yesterday—I did not the least expect it; but, you know, he is always telling us we are to be careful, and we are not to get into debt. I don't like being always told, and he looks so grave, too. This morning he did not seem half to like our going."

"No, George, he did not half like it; but then papa is anxious about us, and you must remember he will be all alone, and it is his nature to be careful."

"All the same, I wish he would not look so grave about it."

"Lewes! Lewes!" shouted the porters, as the train drew up at the station; and out sprang George, to buy some apricots and pears that boys were selling to the passengers in little baskets with fresh green leaves.

The South Downs, that had loomed faint and blue before them, were fairly reached now, and very beautiful were they, as the shadows of the clouds flitted over their green shoulders. To dwellers inland the Downs are at first bare and dreary-looking, but in a little time they begin to grow on one's admiration ; and when studied with a loving eye, they become most lovely, and are so clothed in light and shadow, hiding defects here, and bringing out beauties there, that one would not have them altered. To one, also, who treads them with a light but reverent foot, how delicious are the green, springy turf, the tufts of odorous thyme, and the sweeping views of sea, and wood, and wold that one obtains from their long bare backs !

To meet the young travellers at the station came Captain Harrison and his four children. Vera's quick eyes took in at a glance

the fact that Isabel and Marian no longer wore their hair loose, but had it arranged *en chignon* very prettily with a falling curl, while their costume generally much resembled the fashion-plates in the milliner's windows; and, above all, that Isabel was very beautiful. Further, she saw that Tom, who was at Woolwich, though he had no down upon his cheek, had yet a little fair moustache shading his upper lip, and that Vincent bore the unmistakeable trace of Oxford upon him. But who was the gentleman with her uncle, with grey moustaches, and an empty sleeve, and the broad military shoulders? Major Egan; she had never heard of him.

She preferred to walk up from the station when her uncle asked her, and the girls ranged themselves together, Vera in the middle. George held on to his uncle's arm, with whom was the Major, and the



two young men brought up the rear. Vera and George were rather "young," they thought, and each in his own heart made up his mind not to give himself much trouble about them. The whole party were silent, except Captain Harrison and his friend the Major, until at last Vera said,

"How altered we all are! I am sure I should not have known either of you, unless it were Isabel's pretty hair."

Vera was very anxious to remain out of doors, and see at once a great deal of the clean, pretty, homely-looking town, that won upon her at first sight; but her cousins said that their mother would be expecting them, that they dined in the middle of the day, and drank tea early here, so she was obliged to put off her wishes for the present. Kind Uncle Frank saw the look of disappointment on the girl's face, and said,

"Never mind, Vera, I will take you out

this evening ; and we will hear the band, and wander along the lower terrace together as long as you like. Duty first, you know, my dear ; we will take our pleasure afterwards. Put a good face on the matter, Vera—it is not so bad after the first plunge.”

Vera laughed, and wondered how it was that Uncle Frank seemed at once to divine her difficulties. They all turned into the pretty villa Captain Harrison had hired for two or three months. Mrs. Harrison welcomed Vera and George very kindly, and bid them go up to their rooms and prepare for tea. She went herself with Vera, and made her mental comments upon the girl's appearance, in much this form : “ A tall girl, with nice hair and good complexion. I wonder if she is as clever as Frank thinks ? Rather countrified ; no style ; not likely at any time to interfere with Isabel and Marian.”

And then, looking at the white *piqué* dress that Vera put on, with the violet sash and ribbon for her hair, she said aloud,

“I suppose Brand made that dress, Vera?—it is rather nice, and suits you very well.”

The girl felt the words almost as if they concealed a latent sneer at her faithful servant's handiwork; but she only answered,

“Yes, Brand still makes my dresses. I like it.”

At tea Vera sat near her uncle, with Tom on the other side, and Major Egan opposite to her; and she chatted to her uncle as gaily and freely as she had done when he was at Salisbury. He asked after all her pets and *protégés*; after Mr. Lane, and her little scalded school-girl, and then about her journey down; and she was so bright and natural, giving her own colour to all subjects on which they touched, that Tom

was drawn into the conversation, and found it pleasanter than usual; while the Major, finding her an intelligent listener, told some racy anecdotes of his Indian life—a life of which he usually spoke but little, though it had been full of adventure.

The evening was beautiful and warm, and they walked out upon the parade, and paced the grass whilst the band was playing. Some young people, friends of Tom's, and of the girls', joined them, and they gradually paired off, some walking, some sitting on the benches. Captain Harrison slipped away with Vera, and the Major by-and-by following and joining them, they left the crowd and walked part of the way up the cliffs, whence they could see the gleaming line of lights at St. Leonards, along the water's edge, and the great stars reflected by the smooth grey sea.

The hour grew late, and they went home;

the band had finished playing, the crowds had gone, the stillness of night was falling. The Major went to his quarters at "The Cavendish," and when Vera and her uncle went into the dining-room at the villa, they found a light supper on the table, and George gone to bed.

"I don't know when I have been so happy," said Vera, in the warmth of her pleasure, turning to the person whom she liked the least; "it was so kind of you, Aunt Marian, to ask us here. I have had such a charming walk to-night; and Major Egan is the nicest person I ever saw except papa, and you, Uncle Frank."

"Major Egan nice!" said the girls. "He is considered a very cold, silent man; and he never speaks to us."

"There is no reason he should speak to you," said Mrs. Harrison. "I am not at all anxious he should. He is really hardly in

our position in life. I daresay he is an estimable person; but you know he rose from the ranks."

"Hold a minute, Marian. Major Egan is a gentleman in every sense of the word—his position is just as good as my own, though he certainly did rise from the ranks. He is a brave and honourable man, and I am very proud to know him."

"But he is quite old and grey," said the girls.

"I like people that are old and grey," cried Vera. "But he is not what I call old. He thought just now the grass on the cliff was too damp, and he took off his overcoat for me to sit on. Old people do not do these things, because of their health."

The girls exchanged a smile with their mother; and Vera coloured with vexation that her defence of her new friend had been imprudent. "As usual," she said to

herself. But Uncle Frank looked quite satisfied with her, and smiled over the brim of his tumbler of claret at the young creature's innocence; and she soon recovered her composure.

Several days passed by, in which they walked and drove here or there—sometimes all of them together, sometimes only Vera and her uncle, for they were out somewhere every day. He always carried a sketching-block, and she began to learn a little from him; and every day, at some time, they were sure to meet Major Egan. He seemed to know where they were to be found. Mrs. Harrison and her daughters had the requirements of society to meet, and they drove together, visited, went shopping; but Vera, not being introduced as yet, was a free agent, and enjoyed her freedom. The young men went to the cricket-ground and billiard-rooms, and

George was on the beach with the sailors. Once or twice they had a small party, and music in the evening. Somehow the low chair in which Vera sat became the centre of the circle. Major Egan would lounge near her, and Captain Harrison would lean over the back of her chair, and the young girl simply and unfeignedly enjoyed it.

Mrs. Harrison objected to her being the centre of attraction very strongly, and said to herself, "How absurd of Frank to be always by that girl; and as for Major Egan, he is an old goose."

One evening, when she was more particularly annoyed, she went to Vera, and said that they had never had any music from her, would she play for them, hoping to break up the little circle. The girl rose directly, but she was very timid—she had never played to so many people before; her colour came, and her hand trembled a



little, but she knew she could play; and she chose Weber's Invitation to the Waltz, and played it very well. Just as she rose from the piano, her uncle called out from the other end of the room, "Sing a song, Vera."

This was a greater trial still; her cousins sang unusually well, and she never dreamed of comparing herself with them. They had sung Italian, too. But her uncle had asked her, so she sang the only song she remembered to have heard him say he liked, "My mother bids me bind my hair."

"Sing me a ballad now, Miss Harrison," said Major Egan's deep voice from the wall where he leaned behind her.

She looked up, saw in his face the unmistakeable look of sympathy, though he was "old and grey," and, as she bent her head over the keys, thinking what he might like, her fingers wandered into the old Scotch ballad, "Ye banks and braes," and all the

latent sweetness and melancholy of her nature came out in the sad simple words.

"A thousand thanks!—you have given me a great pleasure. I *may* have heard it, of course, but I feel as if I had not heard that sweet old song since I was a lad—before I went to India."

Mrs. Harrison kept him talking to her awhile, and took occasion to say,

"I had no idea my little niece was so good a musician; but she has been very well taught by the organist at Salisbury, she tells me. She has no mother, poor child, and her education has been peculiar. In a few years she may improve; she is very young, and with a little care and pains——Vera, dear," she raised her voice, "you must soon put up your hair; you are old enough not to have it hanging loose."

"Papa has not spoken of it yet," said Vera.

“Pray let her hair alone,” said the Major, in a low voice, with the most polite of bows. “It appears to me that neither she nor her hair requires pains or improvement.” After which highly satisfactory speech, Major Egan wished her good night, and retired.

## CHAPTER XIV.

“**I** REALLY must speak to Vera, and tell her how unbecoming her conduct is; it is quite absurd for a child like that to be giving herself airs,” said Mrs. Harrison to her husband when they were alone.

“She did not seem to me to give herself airs, and she is a fond little girl enough, is very happy, and does her best to make other people so.”

“Well, I must say, Frank, it is very odd you don’t see the difference between her and our girls.”

“It certainly would be odd if I did not,” said the Captain to himself, with a sigh.

"There is Isabel, really beautiful," pursued Mrs. Harrison, "and Marian, who sings so well; they never let people hang about them in the way Vera does. She is not so very pretty either."

"Quite true; she may not be as pretty as Isabel, but people don't all like others for their beauty; and I can answer for it Vera never perceived the little court about her, she only knew that she was happy. Look here, Marian, you manage your own girls as you like, but you had better leave Vera alone."

Silenced for the time, but by no means convinced, Mrs. Harrison dropped that subject, and began to speak of George.

"He is such a nice boy!" she said. "He went out with us yesterday, and was quite pleased to run into the shops for our errands, and to make himself useful to his cousins."

“Very likely ; it is a nice little change for him.”

“And how good he is to Vera ! When she bathes, she will only go the first of the morning—she says she does not like other people,—and she makes George get up and go down to the beach with her, and wait about for her.”

“Very proper, too ; that is how George has learned his dutiful behaviour to you. But Vera is a very kind sister ; I suspect a good deal of her money finds its way into George’s pocket—or out of it rather ; he has been buying all sorts of useless things here, to say nothing of tarts and toffee.”

And Vera ? She knew perfectly well that her aunt was not pleased with her, but she did not quite understand why. She had heard Mrs. Harrison say to a lady near her, that an education like Vera’s tended to make girls vain and conceited. Was she vain and

conceited? She did not know. Certainly she thought Isabel beautiful, and herself not so. She got up and looked at herself in the glass; she found nothing to admire there, and Marian, so lady-like, so accomplished, she could not compare herself with her. For a moment she wondered if Major Egan was too kind to her—she had read of such things, but her aunt had said he was old and grey, and scarcely a gentleman. Tom and Vincent were talking to other girls—flirting, she said in her secret heart, and the two or three young men she had heard her cousins admire did not come near her. She shook her head sadly, and said,

“I suppose I shall never quite understand; perhaps if mamma had lived, she would have told me things. I do try not to be disagreeable, but it is rather hard to be so very often wrong.”

But her sleep was sweet, and the morning

broke grey and soft with the promise of fine weather, and she had engaged to go out with George boating. She had been out once or twice with him, but she did not care for an objectless row up and down the bay for an hour ; and the boy had amused himself with a boatman to whom he had taken a fancy, and with whom he went fishing constantly ; besides that, his cousins, finding him a bright active fellow, took him to the cricket-field often. Still his best and favourite companion was his sister, and now he would not let her rest till she had promised to go with him alone for a day's excursion, as they had done at home.

Very proud he was of his charge as he walked down the Parade, with Vera's plaid on his arm, and a big satchel on his shoulder, full of "*grub*" that he had coaxed from cook, and two bottles of beer at the bottom.

"Wood came up to me this morning to



say that it was splendid to go round under the Head, and he thought we might get into Darby's Hole, and see some of the old smuggler's caves, if you don't mind a scramble. That is why I told you to put on a rough gown ; I told him you liked a scramble." George was full of delight and excitement, and when he met Wood he ran forward and gave him the satchel, saying, with a boy's queer, proud shyness,

"This is my sister, Dick. I told you I should bring her."

Richard Wood gave a hitch to his short white trousers, and looked at his comely, blue-stockinged legs ; and then he pulled off his hat, showing his curly brown hair, and a row of white teeth in his broad smile.

"Wish you good day, miss—it's a rare day, and no mistake ; but young master here was mad on having you out under the Head first fine day. He'll make a good sailor,

will he ; and I've seen you out with the oars yourself, miss—you're not bad at them."

Meantime they had trudged through the loose beach, and had reached *The Arrow*, as she lay dipping her bows to the water. A good strong shove from two other boatmen, without a drop of spray on Vera's serge jacket, or Wood's wetting his feet, though there was a little wind and the water was merry. How fair and lovely it was!—how fresh the air, how bright and clear the water ! Vera took care to express all her delight, for she knew nothing would better please her young brother than to feel he had given her a pleasure.

They ran in-shore near the Holy-well, and Wood landed to fill an empty bottle he had brought on purpose from the well ; and after rounding the Head, they landed on the low rocks, under the great white cliffs, where men were catching prawns ; and Wood carefully

guided Vera over the slippery seaweed-covered rocks, George following them, until they found themselves on a narrow spit of white sand, immediately under the cliffs, which looked as if they must topple over on to them. They peeped into the caves, and actually got into Darby's Hole, where George, in British boy fashion, inscribed his own and Vera's initials in a wild and flourishing monogram upon the smooth white chalk that Wood had scraped free from the weather-stair; and then returned once more to the boat, and bought some prawns from the fishers, who looked wild-eyed and pale, from their night's watching in that bleak, solitary spot.

Wood and his brother had been seamen, serving in the Royal Navy; the eldest of them was now in the Coast-Guard service, and Richard, George Harrison's boatman, told him and his sister many quaint tales as

they pulled leisurely along, sometimes George, and sometimes Vera, taking the oar. And so they dropped quietly down to Birling Gap, where they beached *The Arrow* and they all three walked up to Bell-Tout ; near the lighthouse they spread Vera's plaid, and George and Wood left her to unpack the luncheon whilst they went to see the beacon.

When they returned, Wood let George outwalk him, and he strolled to the cliff edge, filling his pipe, so as to leave the two young people alone for their luncheon, but Vera sent her brother to tell him there was enough for him also ; so down he came with a jaunty step and a smile, baring his honest brows to the cool air, and standing as he received a portion from her hands, and then again offering to withdraw.

"No," said Vera ; "sit down, Wood. You must have some beer. George has two

bottles here, and he must not drink both."

A pleasant little luncheon party it was, as the Coast-Guard men from above thought. Vera and George were lying upon the plaid, and Wood was sitting in a most uncomfortable position, Vera thought—his legs cramped under him, and his knees up to his chin. They were in no hurry to go. Wood sat a little way off, smoking on the grass, and George lay winding Vera's hair round his fingers, whilst she made a sketch of the cliffs towards Seaford.

"Well, sir and miss, I think it's time we were off; we've a good pull before us, and I think the wind is fresher; there is a light mist coming on too."

"I think this fair, pale coast worse, more cruel than an iron-bound one," said Vera; "that forewarns you of its stern ugliness; this has a fair seeming—it deceives."

"There used to be many a terrible shipwreck here," said Wood, "but not now, miss, thank God."

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Once more under way, they pulled steadily for Eastbourne, but before they made Beachy Head, the mist gained upon them, and the rocks on which they had landed in the morning—the cliffs themselves—were almost entirely blotted from sight, they could scarcely see the long point of rocks that juts under the Head far into the sea.

Wood pointed it out to them, saying,

“I know the coast well, and I know the point of them rocks by the swirl the water takes against them ; but this is why, sir, I would not sanction your coming alone here with Miss.

“It would not be a brave thing, only foolhardy, you said, Wood, didn’t you?”

“To be sure, sir, just that was it.”

“There is nothing to be afraid of, though, Vera,” said George, with an air of superiority—for he had done more boating than she had, and of course knew all about it.

"I am not the least afraid with you and Wood," said the girl with a smile.

"To be sure not, miss." But Richard Wood kept a keen look-out all the way, lest he might drift too far out to sea. It was only half-tide, but the sea was running high, and a good many people were looking out at the only pleasure-boat that was to be seen.

Vera watched the fleet of fishing-boats as they came down one by one with their dark red or black sails, two men and a boy usually on board of each, beating down the wind for the night's fishing. The sun was going down, and the wind was squally. A short heavy sea was running into Eastbourne Bay.

"Ship your oar, Master George, whilst I take the sculls, and put her head about to run in."

George hastily, and without much heed,

leaned over in doing as he was bid, and they shipped a little water.

"Good God, sir, sit still!" shouted Wood.

"We shall be upset."

"What is it, Dick?" said the boy. And almost as he spoke, a wave that seemed as high as his head broke over them, and the boat swung suddenly round to the tide, and Vera felt as if a terrible heart-throb had sent them into shore, but she never uttered a sound. George's face was perfectly white, and Wood looked rather vexed at bringing in his boat half full of water, and leaving one of his oars floating, for George had dropped it in his consternation. There was no great harm done, but the boat had for a few minutes seemed quite unmanageable, and people on shore had been screaming down the beach. Major Egan, walking on the parade with some ladies, saw the little boat, and had been watching its progress,



when suddenly he recognised the long sunny hair.

“My God! it is Vera Harrison,” and it was the work of very few minutes to rush down the steps and on to the shingle, leaving the ladies staring at the quiet man’s excitement. He found Tom and Isabel Harrison there before him, waiting in breathless terror for the poor young cousins, who were alone at the mercy of the water. Some boatmen ran down, and steadied the boat whilst Wood lifted George in his arms, and carried him to a dry spot, where he put him down, and then he returned for Vera. Very reverently he carried her, and placed her by her brother’s side.

“No harm is done,” she cried. “We are only a little frightened, and very wet. Never mind, Richard,” she said, giving him her hand, for he stood looking terribly vexed, and very much inclined to cry.

“George will be quite ready to go out again with you to-morrow ; and you shall take me too, if you will.”

Major Egan said a few words to him, and sent him for the plaid to wrap round Vera ; but she smiled, and refused it, wrapping it round her brother, who was still pale and shivering.

“Come, George,” she said, “let us go home. Dick is waiting for you to say good night to him. You shall go to bed, and to-morrow you will be all right.” She laid one arm about his neck, as in the old child-days at home, and putting the other through her cousin Tom’s, they wended their way back.

Wood looked after them, and shook his head.

“She’s plucky,” said he. “It was my own fault—I *ought* to ha’ knowed a youngster like that couldn’t put a boat about in a big sea ; and I wouldn’t ha’ cared if it had been

only him ; but that sister of his ought to ha' been a queen, and be always able to command fine weather. Richard Wood, you was a fool!"

Vera was quite right. George was not really frightened; his nerves had been shocked, and in the morning he was well. Captain Harrison had been greatly alarmed, for he felt for what might have been his brother's sorrow; and Mrs. Harrison said that really Vera did such unaccountable things that she should never be surprised at anything happening to her. The Major came in to inquire after her, and stayed to breakfast; and Vera described the delights of her day's excursion, and expressed her kindly opinion of Wood, at which all of them rallied her, her uncle even saying,

"One would think your Richard Wood quite a gentleman, my dear."

"I think he is a gentleman, Uncle Frank,

of nature's own making ;" and she described various points of behaviour and character that had struck her. "I think he behaved like a gentleman, and people who are called gentlemen are often not half so considerate. I did not want anyone better yesterday, and I shall always feel respect for him."

"I think she has proved her case," said Major Egan. "When I want a character, I wonder if I may dare to come to you ?"

"Of course you may," Vera was beginning ; and then, seeing the grave eyes fixed upon her, she turned away from him, colouring deeply, as she remembered that she had expressed a very decidedly favourable opinion about him the first night she had met him. He was more flattered at the lovely blush that marked the woman than at the impulsive words of the girl.

"If you please, Miss Vera, Richard Wood sends his duty, and hopes you will like this

basket of whiting," said the servant, coming into the room.

"Richard Wood speaks for himself!" cried Tom; "he proves himself a gentleman; he is a good fellow, and I shall go and have a chat with him. Come along, George. From this moment, Vera, I believe in you."

"If I were rich now," said Vera, musingly, "and if he always remained what he is, I should like to leave such a man money."

"Meantime you are kind and good to him, eh, Vera?" said her uncle, stroking her hair.

"It takes two sorts of people to understand Vera," said the Major to the Captain, when they lounged up the parade to the library after breakfast—"a very simple-hearted person, like this man Wood, or a very deep one, and the larger proportion of the world is not made up of either."

## CHAPTER XV.

WALKING one afternoon with George to Meade, the hamlet lying near Eastbourne, where he wanted to leave a meerschaum pipe and some tobacco as a little present for Wood, who uniformly refused his boatman's fare since the expedition to Birling Gap, Vera suggested that they should pursue their way across the Down to Beachy Head; to which George readily assented. He was always glad to have his sister all to himself. On the slope of the hill they came upon an old man sitting on the grass, fanning himself with his felt hat, and breathing very hard. The young people passed him at a rapid pace, but they heard

him say, in a despairing tone, "Oh! dear, dear, when I was young!"

"Go to him, George," said Vera. "I wonder if he is ill?"

"No, young lady, not ill, but very asthmatic. I was sent down here from London to stay a bit, and see if the air would do me good; and I had heard a deal about Beachey Head, and I thought I would like to try to get there, but I doubt I'm not able for it; and when I saw your young legs, I was just disappointed."

Both brother and sister felt it would be like wanton cruelty to go and leave him, and let him feel his helplessness by watching their active strides. What was to be done?

"Do you think," said George, "if you were to lean on my arm, and we were to walk very slowly, and let you rest very often, you could manage it? You are on the stiffest bit of the hill now."

"I think I could," said the stranger, rising and leaning on his stick. "You are very kind. When one has company, one does not feel troubles so much, and if you can be patient with me, I'd like to try. When my breath comes very short my throat gets dry, and then that makes matters worse."

"That is easily mended," said George, pulling two big pears out of the satchel that he always wore over his shoulder. "Have one of these now, and you can have the other presently."

The old man took heart of grace, and beguiled by the merry chatter of his young companions, after a rather slow and toilsome walk, he reached the top of the Down. His delight was unbounded, such a view had never greeted him before, and they made him go some distance along the cliffs to Vera's favourite spot, close to the last re-



maining "Charles," as it is called in the district. There they sat down and gazed on the varied olive and green expanse of sea, the faint, far-away sound of the ripple on the beach below rising up to them, mingled with the hoarse cry of the choughs, as they flew in and out of their holes in the cliff; the sun was beginning to sink, a great fiery ball, into the waters that were already glowing with his glory, and the air was so clear that they could see on either hand the headlands of Dungeness and of Selsey Bill.

"Well, that is the most wondrous sight I ever beheld," said the old man, stretching himself along on the sweet short turf by George's side. "My daughter down there will be surprised when I tell her—she said I'd never do it; and then I've had such pleasant company too, I'm more obliged to you both than I can ever say."

"But you walked bravely," said George,

"and it did not matter to us how slow we went. My sister and I often come up here. I think she comes up two or three times a week. My aunt and cousins, with whom we are staying, say she ought to have a little cabin up here all to herself; and she would like it, too—wouldn't you, Very?"

"I declare, George, there are Uncle Frank and Major Egan coming up from Bell-Tout. I thought they were gone to Eastdean."

The two gentlemen, as they came up, looked a little surprised at the trio on the cliff edge, but they sat down and joined the group, and entered into the chat of the hour.

"My uncle," said Vera to the stranger, who was preparing to get up and leave them; "pray do not go, you are not rested yet, the sun will be down in a few minutes, and then you will see the lights shine out suddenly, like little stars, from the beacons on every

headland—it is so pretty! I always try to be here at this hour.”

Vera explained to her uncle how the stranger had accompanied them; and he made himself pleasant to the old man, and they talked of many things—the city, and trade, and especially of the hosiery trade. Vera had drawn a little apart, and sat with hands clasped round her knees, gazing into the fiery west, and Major Egan, beside her, saw the reflected glory on her face and uncovered hair.

“Can you not understand,” said she, “when the world was young, some Adam watching that mystery, and the first instinctive prayer rising in his heart, that that glorious God might come again, and not leave him desolate in the dark and cold.”

“Is prayer, then, an instinct, do you think?” asked he.

“Instinct or intuition—whichever you

think the better word—perhaps not uttered, but felt.”

“I had not thought of it so,” said he; “and yet you know I have spent so much of my life in India, that your idea of sun-worship is very familiar to me. I fancy you would like India and its lore—the earliest records of human ideas.”

“I should, indeed! Tell me about it whenever you have a mind.”

“I will lend you some books that will delight you—Ballantyne’s ‘Rig Veda,’ Professor Goldstücker, Sir Emerson Tennent’s Ceylon; and then there is a French translation of Vedic hymns—but perhaps I should not give you that, it has sceptical tendencies, and a young girl’s mind——”

Vera smiled.

“Is easily unsettled, you would say. You may be right, but dare I say to you, that no book—no person would alter my

views, unless my own feelings led me that way. Don't look so grave, it is not meant as a boastful, self-sufficient speech, but I thought I could say all I felt to you."

"Say what you will," he replied, eagerly ; "you are safe with me. Where I disagree with you, I shall tell you frankly."

"Thanks," she said, with a beaming, trustful look ; and then they dropped into silence, and the Beacon lights shone out.

"Let us be going home," said Captain Harrison ; "the dew is falling—we shall be late enough now. I do not wonder at your love of this place, Vera ; it is grand out here, where the holiday-folks seldom come."

"It is not exactly a heaven-kissing hill ; but I fancy the bright god Mercury might have alighted here to survey the world," she said.

"I will answer for it," broke in the Major, "you have never thought of coming

up here at moonlight. You have no idea how wonderful it is! Would you care to come?"

"I should like it immensely!" answered Vera, to whom he addressed his question. "When can it be?"

"In a night or two the moon will be nearly full, and then we can make our party. But we shall be home very late—at two or three o'clock in the morning."

"Well, I will talk it over with them at home," said Captain Harrison, "and let you know, Egan, and then you shall fix the evening."

At the entrance to the town their old companion wished them good night, thanking them all for pleasant society; and when Vera offered him her hand, he lifted his hat on taking it, and said,

"If I can ever be of use to you, young lady, let me know. John Dawson, hosier,

in Fleet Street, will always find me ; and if you and your brother care to come and see our City show and a new Lord Mayor any time, you let me know, and I shall be proud to see you, and give you the best luncheon I know how."

"There, Vera," laughed her uncle, as they went into their own gate, "you may get all your stockings for nothing for the rest of your life, after this day's work. What is the proverb about a gracious woman?"

"Hush ! you must not laugh at me, Uncle Frank ; you promised you would not. I did not do anything so very absurd, did I?"

"No, my dear child—only Quixotic."

"We will call our old hosier 'The Windmill' for the future, Vera, shall we?" laughed George.

When the subject of a moonlight night on the cliffs was first mentioned, the whole

family eagerly declared their intention of being of the party, but two or three days elapsed before it was quite feasible. In his secret heart Captain Harrison believed that the Major spoke in advance, to allow the effervescence of a first new idea to subside, so as to thin off the numbers, for he knew of old that the usually silent and solitary man had a dislike to parties composed of heterogeneous materials, and this dislike would necessarily be greater when the expedition proposed was of a rather high-flown and meditative cast. Whatever may have been the fact, when the time arrived only Vera and her uncle were prepared to accept the Major's invitation to spend a few hours on the cliffs at midnight. Tom and Vincent had taken George with them to a cricket-match at Lewes; the girls had promised to go over to St. Leonard's with their mother.



“And, oh! Major Egan, could you not put it off a night or two, when the boys are at home?”

“I doubt very much if the moon will stay her proceedings on my account. I am extremely sorry,” said he, with a bow, “that I shall not have the pleasure of your company. But suppose we keep our arrangement for to-night, Harrison, and if you and Miss Vera vote it a success, we might repeat the operation at some other time?”

“If you had told us positively it was to-night—if you had even let us know last night; but now——” chorussed Mrs. Harrison and her daughters.

The Major stroked his grey moustache.

“I could not really answer for the weather until the very day. It might have rained, or blown a gale.”

“Sly fellow!” said Captain Harrison to himself, as he watched the Major’s blue eye

fixed on Vera's quiet figure, as she stooped to mend a flounce on Isabel's muslin dress, and then he said, aloud,

"Then we three go, Egan—you and Vera and I. I will see to Vera's wraps and boots; you can walk both ways, child?"

"Excuse me, Harrison, you have shewn me so much kindness, and here you and Mrs. Harrison have allowed me to come and go at all hours, just like one of yourselves, that you must let me be host sometimes. I have arranged everything for to-night. We had better drive there, and we can walk home, if you like. If you report well of my efforts, I want to persuade you all to join a picnic that I and a couple of brother-officers intend to give next week."

"How delightful!—how kind! Just the one thing we wanted to make our holiday here perfect!"

So, in the evening, when the house was

quiet, and Vera was singing to her uncle alone, while he sat reading *The Times*, Major Egan came in with a glad face to say that he was ready, his steeds were outside champing at the bit, and impatient for the course. The party got into the ordinary little basket-carriage and drove up to the Head, toiling but slowly up the steep and stony road. The rising moon threw long dark shadows along the roadside, and into the hollows of the downs ; but, by the time they reached the brow, she shone in full unclouded splendour, in a sky flecked with patches of the finest white cloudlets, like the soft meshes of a Shetland veil.

Supremely beautiful was the scene before them ; the colour of sea and sky was delicately toned, with effect like that of a well-painted middle distance in a picture ; as the mind recognises the true sunlight colouring athwart the grey that represents

it; the cliffs were like the whitest china, glittering with silver points.

The silence was unbroken and intense, save for the murmuring water-voice below; the solitary coastguard on his beat wished them good evening in a low tone, and they spoke to one another almost in whispers.

The Major stayed a few minutes speaking to the driver, and finally dismissing him with his carriage, hurried to join the others as they walked on to Vera's favourite spot. There they sat and gazed awhile; here and there a sail dotted the sea, a tiny light on the edge of some fishing-smack glittered a moment, and presently a boat shot across the gleaming moon-wake on the sea.

"What are you thinking of, Vera?" said her uncle to the silent girl.

"I cannot tell you—at least, do not ask."

"Why not? It was nothing wrong, I

know. Will you not? Should you be afraid to sing to us?"

"What made you ask that?" she said, hastily.

"Did I divine your thoughts, child? Well then, sing."

She waited a moment; nothing but a hymn could be sung there, and her voice rang sweet and clear as she rose to her feet and sang the hymn of her childhood—

"God that madest earth and heaven."

The two men rose also. Captain Harrison joined an under-song to Vera, and the Major bowed his head in silence.

"You will be cold, Vera; let us walk about."

"No, let us turn back a little," said Major Egan.

"I have some coffee for you. Come and see."

A jutting point of rock a little lower than

the main cliff, and protected by it from the slight breeze astir, appeared presently when he led them close to the cliff edge.

"It is perfectly safe. I was here yesterday, and settled all. See, our driver has spread our rugs, and put down my travelling-basket. Come, will you make my coffee to-night?" he said to Vera; and then he saw her hesitate to walk the winding, dangerous path. "Are you frightened?—you have accomplished the few steps of descent, Harrison, very well—have you not? I have but one arm, but you may trust to that one, Vera."

"I know it," she said simply, and let him lead her. There was a wonderful sweetness in his voice, which she felt, though she did not understand it then; and he had not felt happier than he was at this moment, even at Lucknow. She was his charge—it was his right to wait on her, and he delighted to see her pour out the coffee into small mugs

from the coffee-pot which had been placed over a spirit-lamp. He had brought small sweet German rolls, Presburg biscuits, some grapes and figs, and from his pocket he drew a flask containing Curaçoa—such things as he fancied might please a girl, and such as he never touched himself. He gave the remnants of the feast to the Coast-Guard on his weary tramp, and then they began their walk home, turning often to watch some beautiful effect of light and shadow.

“Oh! I wish, Uncle Frank, we were only just going the other way! Let us go back now. I could stay all night,” pleaded Vera.

“And what would your father say? and how would you look to-morrow?—half dead, my child. No, no, you have had quite enough excitement for one night.”

“Only fancy that people go to bed on these nights, and do not know that such a sight as this exists! Uncle Frank is quite

right—this is excitement, more, I fancy, than any ball could be to me. I have never been to one yet. I am not ‘out,’ you know,”—this to the Major, who was smoking quietly beside her—“how much I am obliged to you for giving me this great, great pleasure !”

“Were you happy, Vera? I am very glad.”

“Were not you happy? You liked it too?”

“I—oh, yes. I am as happy as a king, and as jolly as a——”

“Don’t,” interrupted Vera; “when you speak like George, I always think you must be sad; when grave people like you say giddy words, I fancy they would conceal a grief.”

“It is pleasanter up there than down here,” he said slowly; “but one very often has to come down; and I was very happy too, really. See, there is the dawn!”



## CHAPTER XVI.

SO these idle people went on spending the time more or less pleasantly, each in his degree. Captain Harrison smoked a good many cigars, and made many charming sketches; Mrs. Harrison and Marian read a great many library books, and took several drives; the boys all three amused themselves, in boy fashion, lounging, and laughing, and flirting, and being very busy over very little. Tom was to go back to Woolwich after the pic-nic; Vincent was going into Yorkshire; Isabel had grown rather silent. Vera thought she seemed more particular than usual about her dress,

often tried new ribbons, and changed the style of her hair-dressing; and she seemed yet more particular, and more silent, when Mr. Paulett was at the house, or by her side when the band played on the Parade.

Somehow, it seemed as if this tall, pale young man, who wore grey clothes and unexceptionable gloves, was lately much oftener in the house; but then so was Major Egan—perhaps it only was that they knew him better. Once or twice Vera wondered why Isabel seemed to keep back from the others, and walk with the silent young fellow; they did not talk to each other—in fact, Vera could not recall the sound of his voice, and she wondered if they liked silence.

However, she was herself now constantly engaged; when he could catch her, George always asserted his prior right; her uncle found her a better walker than his

daughters, so she was his usual companion ; and lately Major Egan had brought her books, which he would discuss with her, books that wanted attention in the reading, and were worth it.

At last the day of the pic-nic dawned, and the doubts and fears were all laid at rest, for no morning could have been fairer. The party was rather a large one, all the gentlemen of the Harrisons' friends having clubbed to *fêter* the ladies. So they started for Eastdean and Friston, with its quaint beacon church on the hill, some riding, some driving. But Captain Harrison had a mind to sail round to Crowlink Gap, as the wind was favourable, for he had never seen the cliff from the sea ; of course Vera and George must go with him, and of course Tom and Major Egan thought they would prefer going by water too. Richard Wood was ready and proud to go, and they wanted

no more sailors, for Tom and George were very handy, and could work under Wood's orders. Vera had nothing to do but sit and watch the changing sea and sky, an occasional porpoise rolling, and the dipping and diving of the gulls; and she talked to all in their turn, in her own sportive fashion. The Major and Tom were considering whether they preferred to see her grave or gay; and though, at his discriminating age, Tom was not at all likely to fall in love with anything so young, he was pleased with his cousin, and was kind enough to promise to go and see her at Salisbury the first time she asked him. Pointing up to the cliffs on which they had sat in the moonlight, her uncle asked her if she had ever seen or done anything she preferred to that night?

"Nothing, except now and then an afternoon service in the Cathedral, when the

sun is setting, and streaming through the painted windows, and when the organ breathes, rather than peals, under Adams' fingers, some *motif* of Pergolesi, with its quaint intervals; the cliffs are finer, but in bad weather, and even if one were ill and weak, one can have the Cathedral service to enjoy."

"May I come and see you some day, Vera? I have never been at Salisbury, and should like to see it," asked the Major. "You seemed to approve of Tom paying you a visit."

"Would you really come? How delightful! Papa would be very pleased to see you, I am sure. I have told him about you in my letters."

The slightest contraction passed over his face, and then a smile.

"Papa would be glad!—she, of what account was she?" he thought, and he

turned his face away and looked out to sea.

"A penny for your thoughts, Vera?" offered Tom, some quarter of an hour afterwards, and she had lapsed into silence.

She coloured, and laughed.

"Did I look as if my thoughts were far away? They were not. If I were to tell you them, I am afraid you would all think me vain and horrid; but, having said so much, I had better tell you them perhaps. I was wondering, first, whether any of you would come to Salisbury, then I thought of the garden and the Close, and then that I should be going back, and then I wondered if any of you would miss me. Don't laugh, I hardly meant you, Tom—you will have lots to do at Woolwich, and go to balls and drills; but I was thinking of Major Egan, and Uncle Frank."

Both men looked up almost with a start. Miss her! Good heavens! this girl was

playing with fire, she herself unscorched.

"You vain—vain child! you ridiculous, vain child!" said Captain Harrison, with a little forced laugh.

She rubbed her cheek against his shoulder.

"It is your own fault; you have both been so kind to me that you have spoiled me, and made me vain. I was only thinking whether you would look out for some one else to spoil when I am gone."

"I am glad I have made you happy; glad I have been able to 'spoil' you, as you call it, a little while. You walk so much better than your cousins, and like many things that I like, and that they do not care about, so of course I shall miss you; besides——"

"See there," interrupted Tom, "there goes the steamer from Newhaven. We must be close to the Gap now, Wood?"

"Yes, sir, we shall make it in a few minutes."

No one observed that Major Egan had not said a word ; and only the Captain saw the expression of his friend's face, which, as he said to himself, looked as if he were about to lead a forlorn hope ; but he did not dare to intrude any remark upon a state of feeling which he had suspected once or twice, and which had now become a matter of certainty.

When the boating-party joined the others in the village, there was a consultation as to what they should all do with themselves after luncheon, which was being prepared by two or three of the gentlemen and servants on the hill, and to which they were at last summoned. Fruit and flowers were not wanted to make the *al fresco* repast as pleasing to the eye as possible, and there were salads and ice, and claret and champagne.

Mrs. Harrison was installed as president



by common consent of the givers of the entertainment; and, to do her justice, she could do the honours very well when she was pleased. To-day she was decidedly pleased; both her sons, to whom she was greatly attached, were with her, and her beautiful daughter was attended by Mr. Paulett, "William the Silent," as Tom impertinently called him to his brother, as Isabel came up the slope of the hill with him and her father, Vera, George and the Major bringing up the rear.

Isabel looked very lovely, in a pale blue dress, and a hat trimmed with blue convolvulus; but it was the loveliness that the last finish and polish of art could give, and there was a curious contrast between her and the active, eager young cousin behind her, in a plain holland dress, with a dark blue ribbon round her waist, and a brown straw sailor hat with a blue gauze veil—which hat she

slung on her arm when she took her place for luncheon.

"My dear Vera," called her aunt, "I see you are not browned this time, but you will be as brown as a little gipsy."

"Never mind, auntie. I have a year or two to spare before I must guard my complexion; and I have not got wet to-day, or spoiled my dress—it is quite clean."

"But what lovely flowers you have in your belt, and a white moss rose in your hair! Those are not ocean flowers, nor did they grow in Wood's garden."

"Major Egan brought me them when we left this morning, and George put the rose in my hair just now. Did I not say truly that you spoil me," she said, in a low, happy voice to the Major, who was standing behind her—"are you going to sit by me?"

"Of course," he answered gravely, "you are my lady. When we made up our list

for invitations the other day, against every man's name was written a lady's, and he is supposed to provide for her, and be her cavalier all to-day ; your name was written against mine."

"Then you shall certainly have all the trouble of me ; and I will give myself airs, and be now too hot, now too cold, and ask for twenty things, and then not want them when you bring them, if I can remember it," she said, with a little saucy smile ; "but will you really take charge of me ? Then will you do me the kindness to let George be with us too—for all these people here are older, and have their own plans to pursue, and nobody ever wants a young boy like him."

After luncheon the company broke up into little parties, walking or driving in different directions ; and the Major, who had made his arrangements beforehand, waited

till the larger number were already dispersed, and then signed to a man to bring forward a basket-carriage which he had ordered to be sent over expressly, and telling George to jump in, he handed Vera to the driving-seat, and placed himself beside her.

"Now drive wherever you please. I shall be quite contented, and when you are tired, George shall drive."

"But they will expect us at five or six o'clock."

"Not at all. No one will want this carriage to return in. It is mine, and your uncle said he should not take you back in the boat."

He so cleverly arranged this drive that they went across some of the Downs which they had not seen before, and yet fell in with the last conveyance that bore the party back to Eastbourne.

Mrs. Harrison was radiant. William

Paulett had proposed to Isabel, and she had accepted him. Everyone that cared to stay was asked to spend the remainder of the evening at the Villa. Tea and coffee were served. The young men hastily cleared the drawing-room, and Marian sat down to the piano, and dashed into a waltz of Strauss. Almost timidly the Major approached Vera, and asked her to give him a waltz, and was almost hurt at the easy, careless grace with which she said yes, and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

“I am too old for your *valseur*, and I have no hand to give you.”

“No, you are not old, and you waltz perfectly. How delightful to have thought of this dance to-night !”

“Are you happy, Vera?”

“Yes, but not with the same sort of happiness as I felt up on the cliffs. How many minds we have—why?”

He held her clasped with his arm ; her soft hair streamed over his shoulder, and even touched his face ; he felt, he heard the beating of her heart from the rapid exercise—but he drew her no nearer to him ; he held her firmly, as the dance required, but did not straiten his grasp—the brave-hearted man could endure disappointment and pain himself, but he could not have caused grief or distrust in that innocent white soul.

Vera danced with many people that evening, but he danced with her only.

## CHAPTER XVII.

**A**FTER such a long and exciting day, no one was very early the next morning, and it was pleasant to look forward to books, and work, and an afternoon stroll only. But Vera had been out to her usual bath before breakfast; habit was stronger with her than fatigue, and so she had risen at her accustomed hour, and came back the richer by two lovely roses at her breast and a photograph in her pocket. She had never met Major Egan before in her morning walk—she had never given it a thought why. He knew she went out—he often saw her—but he never put himself in her

way; the native delicacy and chivalry of the man's nature prevented him from offending the maidenly modesty that induced her to bathe at the hour when there were fewest people.

This morning, being tired, she thought the fresh air and bracing water would do her good, but she found George asleep, and so went down to the beach alone; and on her return, to their mutual surprise, she met the Major walking up and down on the grass in front of the hotel. He had felt sure she would not be out that morning, and was reading as he walked, not dreaming of seeing her. He got her to prolong her walk a little, and as they passed the florist's he saw a freshly-arrived basket of flowers being unpacked, and there got her the roses. She was looking a little paler than usual, and her eyes looked larger and browner, which effects were due to the



fatigue of yesterday, but they made her prettier, and she looked softer and more womanly to his eyes. When she thanked him for his kindness and attention, he asked her to do him a favour—would she give him her photograph? Certainly, was her answer, if he would call some time in the day, if he cared to have it; but, of course, then she must have one of his. That could be arranged now, and he would give it now, as an earnest of the one he expected from her. He drew out a pocket-book, and let her choose from some five or six; and then he accompanied her as far as the villa gate, and she went in to breakfast.

Left alone with her aunt and cousins, Vera took up the book on which she was engaged—Montalembert's "Monks of the West;" but she was presently addressed by Marian.

"You know, Vera, Isabel is engaged to be married?"

"Is she? No, I did not know it. Is it to Mr. Paulett?"

"Why, of course," said Mrs. Harrison; "he has been so much with us, and so attentive to Isabel, and he is very well off, and altogether it is such a satisfactory match."

"Do you like him?" said Vera simply to her cousin, who only lifted her eyes languidly.

"Like him!—what a ridiculous question! Did I not say she had accepted him yesterday? I think she is a very fortunate girl, and he is very amiable."

"He is a man of very good family, and will have a fine estate on his uncle's death," said Marian.

Mother and daughter went on talking in this strain for a little time, and Vera listened, but Isabel said never a word.

"And you may make a good marriage

some day, Vera, if you are prudent," said her aunt, graciously; "but you are a shocking little flirt. The way you went on with Major Egan would have been very naughty yesterday, only you are so young that people do not mind so much; and then they don't know you here. But your 'sweetheart' is too old for you, and not in the first society—at least, not by birth; but you will learn better," and she shook her finger playfully at the girl. She was too gratified about her own affairs to mind much about other people. But Vera coloured violently, and fired up.

"Major Egan mysweetheart, Aunt Marian! I would as soon think of flirting with papa or Uncle Frank as with him. He is not too old for anyone, but he is too good and too kind for me to joke about."

"You always were the most ridiculous girl, Vera; you do the most outrageous and

hoydenish things, and then you turn round and are as prudish as you please. Perhaps, if you had had a mother to look after you, you would not make such mistakes; but as it is, one would pity you, only you are so self-conscious, so egotistical."

"I am very sorry," was all Vera had voice enough to say ; and by-and-by she stole away to her room to think, and there Isabel joined her, who stooped and kissed her cousin's wet cheek, and then said gently,

"You have not congratulated me, though, yet."

"Oh ! Isabel, don't be vexed with me—do tell me if you like him. Is it rude of me to ask ?"

"Not rude to ask, but rather difficult to answer, dear. I like him better than other people, and quite as well as I need—quite as well as most people like their husbands."

"But I never heard him speak to you.

What does he talk about? What does he know? What does he do?"

"To begin at the end, he is a barrister, but his position is so good that he need not work at his profession always; he knows about as much as most people; he does not talk, certainly, but I do not care about that—when he does speak his voice is pleasant."

"But, Isabel, to spend your life with a person, you ought to respect and love him. My father loved mamma, and I have seen some of her letters to him—she thought, I know, that there was no one like him; and Uncle Frank loved——"

Aunt Marian, she was going to say. Why did she stop? She had never thought about it before, what did it all mean? Perhaps Isabel was right, and people did not what she in her simplicity called "love each other"—at least, perhaps it was not a necessity. Life, which had seemed to her an easy

thing, began to present itself in confused and complex forms. What did it all mean? She sat looking out of the window at the gleam of sunlight on the sea, thinking of yesterday, and the feeling that at least Uncle Frank would miss her, became a living certainty; she knew that she was perfectly happy with him, and that they suited each other, and she was now aware that neither his wife nor his daughters did so suit him.

These thoughts occupied but a small space of time, only time enough for Isabel's lips to form themselves into a smile, as she laid her hand upon her cousin's shoulder.

"Is it a great puzzle, Vera? Don't think about it, dear. Take things easily, as I do. Very little in this world is worth troubling one's self about. William Paulett can give me all I want. You will come and stay with me some day, and see that I am right."

“And I do hope you will be happy, Isa,” cried Vera, putting her arms round her cousin’s neck and kissing her. “I do hope you will. I would love you if you would let me, Isa ; but you always treat me as if I were a child, and did not know many things. Of course I am not pretty like you, nor witty, nor anything but a stupid little country-girl, with cheeks like a dairymaid, and hands like a boy.”

“You silly child ! I could tell you a secret, but I do not know if you would thank me for it. Never mind, little one, I know all about it, and that you are the best little coz in the world ; but I am not demonstrative, and so you must not be hurt when I seem cold.”

Mr. Paulett made his appearance at luncheon, but neither he nor Isabel seemed less at their ease than usual ; he was as pale and impassive as ever, and, as he happened

to come in late, there was no place reserved for him, but he walked quietly up to Isabel, after shaking hands with Mrs. Harrison, and bowed low as he took her hand, presented her with a spray of Cape jessamine, and asked her to make room for him between herself and Vera. So, for the first time, Vera was conscious of hearing him speak; he addressed a few words to Mrs. Harrison and Marian, and Vera watched him with a new interest, and once saw his eyelids flicker, and the grey eyes dilate, as he looked from them to Isabel's beautiful face, and she wondered what had made these two beings like each other. From her wonder and her absent mind she was startled by his voice.

"Isabel has promised to drive with me this afternoon; will you like to go too, Vera?"

"Thank you very much, but—but—oh! Isabel, what am I to say?" asked she, in a little tone of despair.



“We should like you to go, if you like it, Vera. Come and get your hat. I mean it, dear—I asked him to ask you.”

From her window Vera saw the roan horses which it was Mr. Paulett's pleasure to drive, come prancing down the street; and then the young master came out from the villa as they drew up, and stroked them, speaking in a more natural and less cold manner to them, so the girl fancied, than to his human associates. He walked round his high, double-seated phaeton, looking at every point of the silver-plated harness, the pole and chains, the tossing green rosettes on the horses' heads, and their glossy coats, and, being satisfied therewith, he returned to the hall, and leisurely put on his driving-gloves, drawing one off again when Isabel and Vera came down. He put Vera in the seat behind, and Isabel in front, took the white-handed reins from his groom, and

mounted into the driving-seat; the horses backed and reared as the groom sprang up behind, and in another moment they were bowling away on the road to Hurstmonceux. He managed his horses well, he spoke a little to both of his companions, and he had an eye for the lovely country through which they passed; he even checked his horses, and sent his groom to fetch for Vera a branch of the Osmunda fern, which she saw and expressed a wish to have.

"I like him very much," said Vera to herself, emphatically, on their return—"I like him very much, though I do not know why." And more than ever did she wonder at life and its phases.

"Truant!" said Captain Harrison to her in the evening, "I have been wanting you all day. When I came back from the library dinner was over, and you had gone out gadding with other people. Come out

now, and have a turn on the Parade; no one here wants us particularly, and I do want you."

"Ah! Uncle Frank, I have caught you, then! Now I know you will miss me when I go home."

"You wicked child, to be proud and pleased that I shall be left lamenting!" He spoke jestingly, but he felt only too really that he should be lonely without this girl.

His life had suddenly bared to him all its secret depths. He had probably come to a sort of moral precipice like this at other times, but in early years one is very hopeful even about oneself, and the hurry of engagements and professional duties forces one along the track leading past the steep places from which one hides, or turns away one's eyes. And he, in his happy temper and easy nature, had made light of, and passed over difficulties and discomforts that

yet were very real; it was not that he had  
• not known that his married life was uncongenial, but that he had deliberately put away from him the consideration of it. He thought he was no worse off than many other people, and he thought also that he should not improve his condition by thinking about it; so he sighed, or shrugged his shoulders, buried himself in his books, or seized his pencils and went out to sketch; or took himself off on some long and “absolutely necessary” expedition connected with his profession, and so he contrived to bridge or leap the precipice; but now——.

Strangely *àpropos* to his present mood came Vera’s questions,

“Do you like Mr. Paulett, Uncle Frank? Are you glad Isabel is to be his wife?”

“Yes, dear, I like him very well, and I daresay he will make her as good a husband as most people; he is very well off, and the

real question is if they like each other ; I have no objection to him."

An answer curiously like his general temper, and very unlike his state of feeling at the moment.

" But do they like each other ?"

" You ask the most perplexing questions, and want to know about everything. I suppose she likes him ; she is not obliged to marry him. Did you like him, Mrs. Wisdom, to-day ?"

" Yes, I liked him, but in the same way as one says one likes—a steam-engine. No, that is a bad illustration, that is such an ugly thing, and he is rather good-looking and elegant. I cannot think of anything else to make you understand, but a piece of mechanism, quite perfect if you will, but moving from other springs of action than its own will and force."

" What makes you know people, child, in that way ?"

"I don't know; I look at them a great deal, I think."

"Will you look at me, then, Vera?" said Major Egan, coming up from behind them. "I have not seen you all day, and you have not asked me if I was tired of dancing last night."

"I saw you before breakfast—you have forgotten that already; I think you must have been very tired and have slept badly, or perhaps they did not give you a good dinner this evening."

"Thank you, I had a very good dinner, and I am not tired; but what have you been doing all day?"

"I have been out driving with my cousin-in-law elect."

"And she says he is like a steam-engine," laughed her uncle.

"I should have thought he was neither so noisy nor so self-asserting as that highly useful article."

“You had no business to tell the private things I say to you, Uncle Frank ; you see Major Egan has taken quite a different view of a steam-engine from mine. I said he was like some mechanical contrivance that had no will of its own, and I could not think of any machinery but a steam-engine.”

“Yes, that is quite a different view. But he is a very good young fellow. I never heard anything against him, and he is liked at his club.”

“I should not like a steam-engine for a husband, whichever view you take of one. I should prefer the man who could make one. I rather think I should like a husband who had a will of his own—not that I should like to be beaten or coerced any way, but I should like to know my husband was the master-mind and master-hand wherever he was, and could not be driven up and down.”

"You may say what you please to me, Vera, but do not talk this way to everyone, they would find fault with you."

"I am so sorry, Uncle Frank ; how foolish I am ! You would say, like George's song, 'Nobody axed you.' "

"It was not that exactly ; but you have some decided opinions of your own, and you may sometimes be misunderstood—that would pain you. Major Egan here may think you a foolish, nonsensical child."

"He will not misunderstand me," said she gravely.

He thanked her with such a look that, had she been a woman, the depth of his heart would have lain bare before her, and he—would he venture to enlighten her ?

At the gate she stopped him to fetch the photograph she had promised him in the morning ; and whilst he stood there waiting, he spoke no word, and Captain Harrison



was busy making a cigarette, and carefully avoiding to look at his friend.

Having got his photograph, he wished uncle and niece good night, and walked under the great stars, thinking of the happy weeks that had passed over him, and the sweet presence that had made them happy, and thinking so, he wondered what thing it was in her that "expressed her goodliest!"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

MAJOR JAMES EGAN went home and spent a restless night. True, in an intellectual and highly refined sense these last weeks of his life had been very happy, but there must come something of the practical into man's life (perhaps not every man's, but every soldier's), a desire for something definite. He was not a young man—not one at all likely to overrate himself at any time, less than ever would he so overrate himself now before this girl who had become the delight of his heart. But could it be possible that she would stoop to him, or would ever give him a thought?

His own feelings were perfectly clear to

himself, and he never disguised the dread, the almost certainty, that she did not regard him with the smallest affection, though he was proud to think she liked him better than she did others, and better, too, than other women had liked him.

He absented himself for a day and a half going to Dover, to think over his case, and try to come to the conclusion whether he should tell her ; but on the second evening he returned to walk once more beside her, and his heart leaped to see the flash of pleasure in her face at his approach, and then sank at her easy, happy, unconstrained manner to himself and her uncle alike ; and so another day ended, and night came without any sort of decision on his part.

And on the morrow the second half of the proverb asserted itself, " Dieu dispose," for Vera, coming in to early dinner, found a letter from Brand awaiting her.

"DEAR MISS VERA," it ran, "Your papa has been but sadly this past week, and now he is very ill—rheumatic fever, the doctor says; but your papa is very patient, and does not ask for anything. I asked him last night would he wish you to return, but he said no, not to disturb you, and not to let you know he was ill. But I know you so well, Miss Vera, that I think you would be angry with me did I not tell you; and with good reason, I say. My love to you and Master George. I am so glad you have been happy. Cook and Eliza's duty, and we shall be glad to see you again—the place is not the same without you.

"Good-bye, my dear, and do not be alarmed. I will write again to-morrow. You know I will do all in my power for poor master.

"Your affectionate and obedient

"MARY BRAND."

The letter had been lying in the dining-room—into the drawing-room Vera rushed with it in her hand.

“Aunt Marian, papa is very ill; I must go home. Read this letter from Brand. I must go directly.”

“Nonsense, Vera; you cannot do anything of the sort. Your uncle is out riding with Marian. He will not be at home till late. You must wait and speak to him.”

“No, no, I cannot wait, I must go. When will there be a train? Is there no one to tell me? I have been here happy, and papa has been ill.” The girl was almost beside herself.

“You are the most absurd girl,” began her aunt; but Vera fled from the room, and in the hall met Major Egan, who had just been admitted.

“Oh! I want you,” she cried. “You have always been so good to me, be my

friend now. Come and speak to Aunt Marian—come and help me! I *must* go!” She held his hand fast in hers, and drew him into the drawing-room.

“Speak to my aunt for me—she will not understand.”

“Neither do I,” said he, gently. “Try to be calm.”

Then she told him her trouble, and a great throb of pain rose in his heart, but he stood still, and said, quietly,

“Her feeling is very strong, Mrs. Harrison; I think she should go. You will allow me to express an opinion?”

“Certainly; but I don’t agree with you, she ought to wait for her nurse’s letter to-morrow, and at least to see her uncle to-night; but she always has her own way.”

“And lose a day, auntie! Please, please let me go!”

“I cannot prevent your going, of course.

I do not approve of it. I am going down to luncheon ; you can come if you please." And she swept out of the room, highly offended.

The girl's tears rose, and fell in two or three large drops on her flushed cheeks; and the Major grasped tightly with his hand the back of the chair against which he leaned ; he longed to give her his sympathy, but did not dare to speak, lest he should tell her all his heart's secret. Presently, in a low, changed voice, she said,

"I cannot help it. I am very sorry to vex her, but papa is my best friend. I *ought* to go, I think. I shall go."

"Good," he said ; "then what shall I do for you ? Where is Bradshaw ? Have you any packing ? There will be a train in an hour. Get yourself ready, eat something, and I will have a fly ready for you, and will go with you to the station."

"Thank you so much ; how good you are to me always ! Uncle Frank is gone out with Marian, George is away at Pevensy with Wood, and Isabel——"

"Is here," said the young lady, coming in. "Darling Vera, do you want to run away and leave us ? Poor little woman, I know how much you love your father. I don't blame you. Come, I will help you to pack."

When Major Egan came back she was quite ready, and had gone to her aunt in the dining-room, who made her sit down and eat, and even drink a glass of wine, much to the girl's discomfort, for she never touched it.

"But I am not pleased with you for going, Vera. It is not right of you to act against my wishes, and I think it very improper of you to go a long journey by yourself. Still I hope you will soon have your





if I can; think of me as your greatest friend, and call upon me for whatever you may want? You have said several times that I was good to you. Give me this return of perfect trust; and I want you to wear this ring for my sake. Let me put it on your finger. Keep it to bring your remembrance back to you. I do not ask much from you, Vera, but you must not forget me."

"I shall not," she said, laying her hand in his, as solemnly as if she had been taking an oath. "What a pretty ring it is! I never had one before; I value it greatly. Should you mind doing one other thing for me? I had better leave this money for George. Will you give it him?" She took an envelope from the satchel at her side, and leaving four or five shillings only in her purse, she enclosed the remainder for her brother. "And say good-bye to Wood for me."

The engine was coupled ; he would soon be left alone. He still held her hand in his, gently and tenderly, as a mother might hold her child's, and was about to press his lips upon it, as he said, " Good-bye, and God bless you, darling child ! " But she lifted the sweet face and loving eyes to him, and he stooped and kissed her.

She saw him turn pale, and as the train slowly moved out of the station, something in the droop of his head and figure made her look at him again. Were those tears in his eyes ?

Like a sudden inspiration the truth dawned upon her. He loved her. She ! What was she to a brave, high-hearted man like him ? She could have kneeled to him in her self-abasement. Such a simple little girl she was, and he had loved her ! She might perhaps never see him again—never be able to let him know how she honoured

him ; and the poor child's heart was torn between the dread of finding her father terribly ill, and the bitter pain of regret for her apparent ingratitude.

He went into the livery-stables and ordered out a horse, and rode fast and far over the Downs, where he had been with her, and towards evening returned leisurely to Eastbourne, made a pretence of dining, and walked up to the Villa, where he found the opposition of feeling running very high on the subject of Vera's departure.

"My dear Egan," began Captain Harrison, "I did so hope you had taken my duty, and gone with that child."

"I would not have gone with her for the world, and spoiled her heroism. She was high-strung, and was capable of doing anything. I let her have all her glory, even to getting her ticket herself. She was quite cool."

"You call it heroism," said Mrs. Harrison; "I call it self-will. I never saw a girl with such an opinion of herself, though Isabel will have it she is a humble-minded girl."

"We will not discuss the matter," he said; "we should probably not agree as to terms. But in the main——"

"But, Major Egan," interrupted Isabel, "I think Vera's devotion to her father very beautiful. She was so happy here, and she never gave her own pleasure a thought."

"I have rarely seen—never seen—a girl so gifted as your cousin, or any girl with so fine an intellect, so womanly a nature, and so innocent a soul."

"A very strong expression of opinion," said Mrs. Harrison. "If she had only been older!"

"Ah! if," said he, and he held up his head and smiled. "Here, George, your sister

bade me give you this. I believe she has given you all she had, so don't waste it. If you have a mind to smoke, Harrison, come out ; I want a stroll."

He staggered slightly as he crossed the hall, and steadied himself by the table, drawing his breath fast.

"I am hard hit, that is all, Harrison," he said, with a smile ; "the bolt went home, and I shall never recover it."

Captain Harrison looked at the sad face, and pulling him into the dining-room, he made him drink some wine, and then arm-in-arm they left the house.

"I meant originally to have remained here only a few days," the Major pursued ; "but she made the place so pleasant to me that I stayed on. I shall go almost immediately abroad now, and shall spend the Winter in Rome ; and then—we shall see. Don't be unhappy about me ; I am not un-

happy, though I am restless now. I shall bear my hurt well, never fear."

"Did you speak to her? did you tell her?"

"Oh, no! Why should I grieve her innocent heart? I would not have told her for the world; let her think of me as her best friend. No, it would have been of no use to speak; she does not love me—if she had, or could have, she would have found me out long ago. No, she does not love me. If I had spoken, I should have lost her altogether. And what am I, that she should have loved me? No, *l'amour sait s'effacer*, you know. What sort of love would mine have been, if I could have given her a moment's pain?"

"I am very sorry," began Captain Harrison; "she valued you so much, she surely would have——"

"No, no; don't say a word—I know it is ended."

Within a week he was gone ; but during those last days he was out constantly with George and his boatman, because *she* had liked them. The lines in his face deepened a little, and his eyes were graver and sadder ; but no one observed this except his old friend, who watched him with affectionate solicitude.



## CHAPTER XIX.

VERA walked down from the station to her father's house, not knowing how ill he might be, and fearing that the sound of wheels might disturb him. She went in at the garden gate, and across the lawn to the open library window, and entered unperceived. The house struck her as fearfully silent, lying like a great dumb creature in the sunshine, and the garden looked, not neglected, but forsaken; in the library lay books, papers, even letters unopened; the dining and drawing-rooms were deserted; everything was in its place—that wretched unused look—the whole

life of the house was in that sick-room upstairs and in the kitchen. The girl stood for a minute overwhelmed with the contrast that a few hours had presented to her—there all life and joy, here utter silence. The tears came into her eyes, but they must not be shed; her father must not know that return to him had cost her even a sigh. She went quietly to her own room, took off her hat and jacket, and changed her dress, that he might see no sign of travel, or of haste and discomfort about her.

“Brand,” called Dr. Harrison’s voice from his bed to the woman sitting working in the window to catch the last light—“Brand, tell Vera to come to me.”

The poor nurse turned round with a blanched face and a great terror at her heart. Was he delirious?—rheumatic fever did cause disordered mind.

“Miss Vera, sir—is—at Eastbourne,”

stammered she. "Do you wish me to send for her?—shall I telegraph?"

"No, no, go to her room," he said, rather impatiently; "she is in the house. Can you not go? Go and tell her to come"—these words still more impatiently. "She is at home, I tell you."

What to do, Brand knew not; she was afraid to leave him alone, if this really meant delirium; but she must not anger him, so she rang the bell for some one to remain with him whilst she went, to gratify his fancy, into the girl's room.

"Are you going, Brand?" asked he anxiously.

"Yes, sir, this moment," she heard coming footsteps, "I only want to put this work——"

The door was gently opened, and with her usual step and manner Vera walked into the room. Brand did not scream, but she was

dreadfully frightened—she hardly realised that the girl could possibly have returned so soon after her letter. Vera pressed her hand as she passed her, and then went up to her father's bedside, and stooped to kiss him.

“Touch me very gently, child, a sudden touch sometimes causes me intense pain. I wanted you, Vera, but Brand was not convinced that you were in; did I speak crossly to you, Brand? I did not mean to do so. But I heard your step, my dear, and I wanted you. I was thinking of you last night, and—am I all wrong? What do your surprised faces mean?”

“Nothing, papa, but that I did not know I had made any noise to disturb you.”

“No, not to disturb me, but I heard you. I like to hear you. I seemed to feel you were at home. Never mind, don't explain; you are here, that is enough for the present.

I think I shall sleep, if you will stay and let poor Brand rest awhile. I have been a trouble to her."

And he slept. He was pleased and comforted to have his child at home again, but her presence could not cure him, nor could it spare him one hour of suffering; some kinds of disease, certainly those in which the mind is at all involved, may be relieved, marvellously, too, in some cases, even cure appears to have been consequent upon the gratified affections, but rheumatism is not one of them; and Dr. Harrison was very ill; his life perhaps was never in danger, but there was a prospect of many weeks of suffering and helplessness. Now he was actually ill, the irritability of temper that had sorely tried Vera at other times was quite in abeyance, but there came upon her the necessity of thinking of, and doing, everything.

About a fortnight after her return, she sent for her brother, and sent him in at once to her father's room, on some needful errand, with only the words.

"Vera thought, papa, I might bring you this."

And the father quietly accepted the explanation, and asked no other—seemed indeed not to be aware but that his boy had been always there. Then came the question about Mr. Lane. He was to have returned to them for a short time, but Vera wrote and told him of her father's serious illness, and that it was impossible for her, at any rate, to be away from him; and she talked to her father from time to time, gently trying to lead him to decide upon something, and after many sentences and remarks beside the question, the last words he said were,

"We will think of it, my child. I only

want to do what is right. We will talk of it again."

Poor Vera! At last she said, this must be decided, and she wrote asking her uncle to come to her, and then she asked Mr. Lane to come and meet him; and so she parted from the tutor who had been so much her friend, to whom she owed all her instruction and cultivation, parted from him with deep regret, and many promises for the future. Captain Harrison took George up to Winchester,—his name was already on the books; and Vera saw herself free to devote all her time to her father, and was very much alone.

Before her uncle left her, she told her father in detail all the arrangements that had been made, and for a moment his eyes flashed up, but he looked at the quiet, earnest, loving face, and murmured,

"Well, my dear, I suppose you know best, but I think——"

"Mr. Lane could not have remained here, papa, with advantage to me. I cannot have more than you to think of, and if George had been left doing nothing, it would have been bad for him—he must have gone some——"

"I think Vera has been quite right, George," said the Captain.

"Very well, then, I will be content. I am only anxious for the children's own good."

"I did not like doing all this, Uncle Frank," Vera said to him in the evening, "but what else was possible?"

"It is all right, depend upon it you have done right."

"But papa is not pleased, you know. How strange that he should be so good a doctor, and be obliged to think and act at once for others, and in all home matters he is so undecided."



“Send for me, dear, when you want me. We are all going back to Brighton directly. Isabel will not be married till the Spring. George told you, I suppose, that your friend, Major Egan, is gone abroad?”

“Yes,” she said, and the blush overspread her cheek and brow, but she said no more than, “He was so kind and good to me ; how long ago it seems !”

She *had* understood, then, Captain Harrison thought, but she did not know that her uncle had ever guessed the Major’s secret. For a moment she wondered could she say anything, could she send him one kind word, for her soul was deeply moved, and she felt very humble at the remembrance of his affection.

She might perhaps have grieved much for her lover and her tutor, have exalted them to that pedestal on which lonely women, living monotonous lives, often do exalt the

human creatures that have made themselves dear or necessary ; but all her time, all her energies, were engrossed by the sick parent. She passed the greater part of her days in his room, reading aloud or talking to him when he could bear it ; she wrote his letters, she went through all his accounts ; when she went out, she called by his request on patients who depended upon and trusted him ; her life was completely filled with his affairs ; even when she went to bed she was too exhausted to think or dream, and her life at Eastbourne seemed far away and shadowy. Its pleasures were not forgotten, nor was her friend, who had indeed been the spring of all her enjoyment there ; but she laid his memory by in her heart's recesses. She was not unhappy, and never lost her cheerfulness ; but these long hours of patient endurance told upon her, and deepened her character very much ; some-

times certainly she felt tired, tired rather in mind than in body, and as if the world had suddenly turned grey and misty. Yet the wonderful patience and hopefulness of youth buoyed her up, and she said, in her heart, "The sun is still shining over Beachy Head."

During these days of her father's illness, one or two of his oldest friends came occasionally to see him, when he could bear a visit from them. He never complained of the tedious hours, the fluctuations or suffering incident on the disease, and his love for and trust in his daughter increased daily, he could not speak fondly enough of her to his visitors. Some one said one day that Vera had been considered flighty and superficial ; he smiled as he replied,

" Because my child has naturally so cheerful and childlike a disposition, she is thought flighty, and because she has that useful gift

to a woman of turning her mind to many things, she is called superficial; I am her father, and perhaps am partial, but, on the other hand, being her father, I should be keenly alive to her defects; had Vera been a man, believe me in the race of life she would have won her crown."

Yes, her father loved her—loved her tenderly, with that belief in her which her earnest nature required; and this gave her courage to face her probable future of patience and forbearance, the doctors having told her that her father would be subject to rheumatic attacks all his life, and that she must be prepared for much irritability from him, induced by the complications of his illness. So Vera's dread "that papa was going to be ill," expressed some months before, had become a truth; and there was nothing for her now but to meet it bravely, and do her best. There was one circumstance in this matter

that might appear insignificant, but was peculiarly trying to her disposition—that to strangers, or casual visitors, her father was cheerful, even gay, when to her he would be gloomy, anxious, and irresolute ; but this was after he left his sick-room ; whenever he was actually ill, he was perfectly quiet and thankful.

At last Dr. Harrison began to improve—was able to leave his room, and gradually to return to his usual routine of life ; at first he was rather lame, and required constant care, but was then able to drive about alone as of old. He was constantly irritable, however, at home, and ready to take offence, and would be displeased with George's letters, and vexed at some oversight of his or Vera's.

Now that the girl was free again to come and go as she pleased, she found her life even more lonely and monotonous than when she had the duties to her sick father to engage

her imperatively. She taught regularly and assiduously in the Sunday Schools. She tended her flowers in garden and greenhouse. She read much and carefully, and began to read the newspapers, that she might talk over with her father the political events of the day; but her best delight and comfort was her music—she spent many quiet hours with Adams, her former master, and often went with him into the Cathedral to practise.

Going one day with him, she played a new Service of Elvey's, which he was anxious to hear; and wishing to judge of its effect, he left the organ-loft, and went down into the choir. He called up to her once or twice, asking for a passage to be repeated; and by-and-by, when she played the Voluntary intended to accompany the Service, he walked leisurely through the nave and back again, with his head bent, and his hands folded be-

hind him. Presently, when she had finished, he asked her to play the Kyrie Eleison from Mozart's Twelfth Mass ; then again he asked for Handel's " He shall feed his flock," which happened to be the piece she played best ; and afterwards she heard his voice below, as if speaking to a person near him. So, having finished her music, she came down into the choir, and passed with a smile the organist, who was talking to a tall, fine-looking man. They both bowed to her. On Sunday afternoon, in the stall opposite to her, sat this tall man, and she fancied that his dark eyes rested more than once upon herself ; but she was not surprised at that, when, after service, he waited in the nave until she and her father came out, and then advanced to Dr. Harrison and greeted him, making many inquiries after his health, and regretting to have heard he had been so great a sufferer.

At the first pause in these civilities, Dr. Harrison said,

“My daughter Vera—Sir Bertram Norreys.”

The girl bowed, and blushed slightly, and the gentleman gave her a curious, searching look, then let his eyelids slowly fall, and hide his brilliant eyes.

The gentlemen talked to each other, and Vera's arm supported her father, for this little incident happened before he had quite regained his strength. At the doctor's door they stopped.

“Will you care to come in? My daughter and I are alone,” asked Dr. Harrison.

“Thanks, I should like it much, for I am quite alone at Avoncourt.” Once more he looked at Vera, and once more his eyelids fell.

He had succeeded at once in obtaining that wish which had induced him, who rarely



went to church, to go to that afternoon service: Vera had greatly attracted him—her music, her carriage, her air, her lovely smile, had struck his fancy a few days before he wished to see her again, and, having done so, he at once made up his mind to improve upon the old acquaintance that he had had with the doctor.

Vera left the two gentlemen together over her father's books in the study, but they joined her presently in the drawing-room, and Sir Bertram took her in to dinner. More and more was he pleased with her; the whole house was full of her—the quiet servants, the simple, well-served dinner, the elegance of the drawing-room, all bore witness to this young girl's management; and when he talked to her, he found broader and juster views and a more cultivated mind than he often met. Late in the evening he said a few words about himself:

"I think of staying awhile at the Park. I have not been here for ten years, though I have been in London on business; but I think I really ought to stay here for a time, it is hardly fair to one's tenants to be always away. You will come and see me, Dr. Harrison, sometimes, will you not? I fear I have no other friends left here now; people soon forget—and perhaps"—with a sigh—"I do not deserve to be remembered. But it is dull here alone; I hope my sister will come to me directly, and then you will give her some of your society, Miss Harrison? You will like each other. Are you never dull here?"

"No," said Vera, "not dull, but a little stupid perhaps, and sometimes a little tired."

"I wonder," said Sir Bertram to himself, as he walked home, "if she could care for me?—and if that 'a little tired' means an unoccupied heart?"

## CHAPTER XX.

ON his return to Avoncourt that Sunday night, Sir Bertram Norreys ordered candles to be lighted in the library, and sat down at once to write a letter to his sister, telling her that, if she could be prevailed upon to come and keep house for him, he was inclined to remain in Wiltshire for some time.

“I do not fancy,” he wrote, “that I am asking more than you will care to perform, for you always loved the old home, and you promised when I was over here before that you would come to me. Come then, dear Julia, and let us see if we cannot make

the place pleasanter to each other. I will give orders for paint and whitewash when I have your answer. White can get gardeners enough, I daresay, and if you have a fancy for any new furnishings, they can be done better under your own eye. You will bring your own maid, of course ; Carlo is still with me, we shall only want house-servants."

He said he should give orders for putting the house in order when he had received his sister's answer, but before he slept that night his mind had wandered over everything he would like to have done. He woke in the morning fresh and alert, all his thoughts bent upon this new object of interest ; it seemed to him as if he had never had any such for years. Why had he not lived here ?—it was his home, his own. He eagerly longed for an answer to his letter to his sister, though it had been but an hour

or two on his way: he would in his impatience have gone at once to London to hear her answer; but to go to London was a journey involving many hours, perhaps two days, and he had far too much to do in the estate to spare all that time: besides, there were tradesmen he must see in Salisbury—at least, so he told himself.

He went over the whole house from room to room, making a list of what might be wanted, with the old housekeeper in attendance upon him: but to her he spoke only of repairs, and nothing of the underlying intention in his mind. He had some difficulty in persuading himself not to send for his steward, and enter with him at once into minute calculations of the cost of his contemplated arrangements.

The housekeeper was quite astonished at the affability and consideration of her master; he seemed to want to know so many things,

and she was truly pleased to have the opportunity of talking a little.

“Are you very dull here, Mrs. Thompson? You never see a soul from these windows,”—he was walking with her at the moment through the servants’ quarters—“unless it be the gardener or farming-men.”

“Not dull, Sir Bertram; the likes of us are not much used to think about dulness—leastways, such as have been born and bred to the country only. I doubt town-servants might find it dull. You see, sir, the gates are closed; ’tis not like a show-place to which tourists come. The only people I ever see besides my own folk, who come now and again for a day’s visit to me—I hope no offence in that, Sir Bertram,” with a curtesy—“and saving again Mr. and Mrs. White, is the minister, and Miss Harrison and her young brother, Master George.”

“Miss Harrison!” he exclaimed; and the woman thought he was angry at the notion, and began to excuse herself.

“Well, Sir Bertram, they are but children like, and they would come in with their tutor, they called him, and feed the swans, and walk about the old garden. Miss Harrison did seem to have an uncommon fancy for the place, and she would sit alone on the edge of the old fountain and sing low to herself. But I have not seen her this long time. She came once with her uncle, I think she said—a tall man with a beard—early last Summer; and she took her tea along with me and my grandchildren——”

“Her tea!—where?” he interrupted, with a frown.

“Lord! Sir Bertram, in here, sitting on that very bench. I hope, sir, you’ll excuse me making so bold as to ask anyone into

the house, sir, without leave." Poor Mrs. Thompson could only imagine a cause for his frowning vexation according to her own lights.

He burst out laughing.

"Good heavens! you asked Miss Harrison into the kitchen! I would not have ventured to do it."

"If you'll believe me, sir," continued the housekeeper, greatly relieved in her mind, "she liked it. She sat as pretty and as kind as if she had had her tea in the kitchen all her life. There is no pride in Miss Harrison.

"The devil there is not!" said he, under his breath.

"But since then she went to the seaside, I think I heard some people say, one Sunday; and then she was sent for to her papa. He was mortal bad, I heard, and she had a hard time of it, poor young lady!"



He stood looking out of the window upon the courtyard and the low wall of the kitchen-garden, under which was a long bed of common flowers—crocus, snowdrops, and a few wallflowers, just blowing, over and beyond the boughs of some fir-trees. Once more he laughed, and said, unconsciously, aloud, “Vera Harrison drinking her tea in my kitchen!” and then he nodded to the woman, bent his tall head under the doorway, and went out.

“Whatever is up with my master?” she thought. “Anyways, he was not angry. He is a bad one to vex.”

Sir Bertram walked into the hall, and took down a hat and stick, and then went out into the gardens. How miserable, how neglected they looked! He went into the greenhouses; nothing there but the vines, which had been kept in order. Yes, in one he found a Banksia rose, two pink camellias,

and some double violets, from all of which he plucked some flowers. There again he added to the list he had been making in the house, and coming back through the ladies' garden, he stood on the brim of the fountain Vera liked. That should be repaired at once. Come what might, even if his sister did not come to him, even should he find England unendurable, that fountain should play again, and the little parterre about it should be gay once more, that when she chose to go and sit there, it should please her.

He, too, sat down on the stone margin, and rolled up a cigarette; and then, with the flowers in his hand, he walked into Salisbury. He gave the orders to the stonemason, and strolled through the city, making many inquiries bearing upon the purpose he had in view; he went through the Close and into the Cathedral precincts, but he did

not see Vera Harrison, and on his return to his silent, neglected home, he felt more dull and lonely for the very lightness of his mood in the morning. He strolled out in the dark into the demesne, from sheer restlessness, and then, duller than before, returned to his warm library, to sit late over the fire. The second and third day were the same, the third night so overwhelming to him that he made fifty projects for the morrow : he would go to London ; he would go to Italy ; he would see Vera ; he would cut the whole thing. His mood was very stormy, and in his heart, even once between his clenched teeth, he cursed all women's idleness and negligence, his sister's included, because she had not answered his letter, and he loudly cursed his own folly in being ever weak enough to trouble himself about any women.

His dinner did not please him ; Carlo's coffee was bad ; the house was cold ; the

glass was falling—it would rain to-morrow ; but the fountain was nearly finished, and night brought forgetfulness.

The morning broke still and grey, but there was no rain, and on his breakfast-table with the daily papers lay a letter from his sister. He read it eagerly. Dear and good Julia, she was too happy to please him. She would come down on Saturday. Now it might rain ; he would brave the horrid English weather ; he would now go with not only the hope, but the intention, of seeing Vera.

He once more took his way across his park and meadows into the city, once more with flowers much the same as those he had plucked three days before, in his hand. Those had been tossed into the river as he returned, these should be more fortunate, he would call at Dr. Harrison's house. He was whistling softly the air, "Ah ! quell'

amor," and he met the object of his last few days' thoughts walking rapidly down the street from the railway station, with a parcel of books.

"Do let me carry those for you," he said, after they had greeted each other. "Why should you be carrying such a heavy load?"

"Pray do not think about it. I carry many things, when it suits me. But perhaps you are shocked; I fancy you are," she said, laughing, and looking at him. "Then do not mind me, but go on your way and leave me."

"At least let me have them," he persisted.

"No; if you are scandalized at me, I could not possibly subject you to the same annoyance."

He frowned for a minute, but Vera was firm.

"I was coming to see your father," he said.

“Yes?—then if you are not too much disgraced at my companionship, will you come with me now, for he will be at home for an hour perhaps.”

As they passed a green-grocer’s shop, Vera saw some seakale, which she thought her father might fancy, and she went in, bought, and brought it away with her, regardless of Sir Bertram’s presence. But when she went into her father’s house, she found him sitting in the drawing-room with two old ladies, Miss Bells, and she led the Baronet thither, her parcels still in her hand. Laying down the books she said,

“I am afraid, papa, I have disgusted Sir Bertram Norreys, by carrying all these things through the town, but I could not help it—it is my habit to do so.”

She laughed, and left the room to give some order for luncheon. Dr. Harrison was beginning a sort of excuse for his daugh-

ter's independent ways, but one of the ladies interrupted him.

"Don't apologize for Vera, doctor. Vera might carry a clothes-basket or a bonnet-box, and be none the less the gentlewoman that she is. I never shall forget, a year or two ago, her gravely walking up to our house with a big fowl, feathers and all, when my sister there was ill, Sir Bertram, and my sister said, 'She has got the guinea stamp.' She can do pretty much what she likes; and indeed I think sister was right."

This was said rather defiantly, for the two old ladies loved Vera, and they had lived contentedly in a small house in the town, whereas this Baronet could not be satisfied and live in his beautiful palace.

However, he took the matter of his setting down very quietly, being happy where he was, and pleased to hear her praised,

and still more pleased when she came back into the room, with his violets and a pink camellia in her hand. At luncheon he told them that his sister was coming to live with him, and that he meant to stay some time at Avoncourt. He was pleased, and so pleased others; he was in the happy mood in which one says almost unconsciously the right thing to every one. He talked of Italy, of her political interests, and of her natural beauties and advantages, showing some good sense and feeling, and observation—in short, he made himself agreeable, and he won more upon the girl's kindness by his civility to her old friends, by asking them to visit his sister whilst she was at the Park, than by any attention he paid herself.

The doctor went out after luncheon, but Sir Bertram returned to the drawing-room with the ladies, and Vera played for them.



On Saturday Miss Norreys came down. Her brother, who was waiting at the station for her, thanked her warmly for coming down to him ; and she saw at once that something had given brightness to his eyes, and had driven away his frown. The Park looked fair to her as they drove in at the gates, though it was still early in Spring, and there were few trees in leaf, but there was already the wonderful charm of promise.

There were no more preparations made in the house than there had been when she was there with him ten years before, but every room was clean and in repair—it wanted but the wand of the mistress, fairy-like, to wake it all up to life. Her own old room was ready for her, and there were two maid-servants in the hall, who curtsied to her as she passed through to dinner.

A pianoforte was in the little drawing-room, and she sat down to it in the evening,

and waked echoes that had been silent so many years. Her brother had been very silent since her arrival, she thought, as she kissed him and wished him good night; but he was less gloomy—the spell that had settled on his life seemed broken.

On Sunday afternoon he proposed, as it was fine, to drive her in to the Cathedral service; to which she readily assented, glad that he would go to worship a Creator whom she sometimes had feared he had forgotten.

Again he sat opposite the girl who was gradually usurping all his thoughts. She had now become somewhat used to him, so that this time she did not consider whether his dark eyes rested on her or not; she knew that he was there; perhaps it gave her pleasure; had she been asked she could have said no more herself.

She was alone to-day; should he, could he speak to her, was the burden of his

thoughts through great part of the service.

No, yes, no—yes, were the answers his mind made to him during prayers, and when the congregation was dispersing. Yes, Fate was propitious. She stopped to speak to an urchin with tear-stained face, whose stock of barley-sugar drops had been torn from him by an angry schoolmaster, with a promise of further punishment on the morrow; and he drew near enough to attract her attention, and was able to inquire after her father, and to introduce his sister to her. They walked together to the doctor's door, and then Sir Bertram said,

“Come and see my sister to-morrow, Miss Harrison; I have been told you have been several times to Avoncourt when we were not there. Come to-morrow to see us, will you? My sister will be lonely down here, all her friends are at a distance, you will do her a kindness by coming.”

"Yes, do come to-morrow. I shall be very glad," Miss Norreys said, wishing to please her brother by echoing his invitation.

For a moment Vera hesitated, and then said quietly, "I will come. If papa is well, I will come."

## CHAPTER XXI.

“**W**ILL Miss Harrison come here to luncheon, do you think?” asked Miss Norreys of her brother as he got up from breakfast.

“I should imagine not, you did not ask her then; but I really cannot say.”

“Would you have liked me to ask her to luncheon?” she said; and though she tried to speak in her usual manner, there was a slight tone of curiosity and attention in her voice.

“My dear Julia, you shall judge for yourself to-day what she is; and if you like her, you can ask her when you please in future. To-day does not matter.”

She smiled and nodded to him, intending to do all she could to give him pleasure, and went to her sitting-room ; while he sat down to his writing-table, having already sent for his steward to go through some business.

He knew Vera would not come till the afternoon, and he must give himself some compulsory occupation to curb his restlessness. Mr. White stayed and took his luncheon with Sir Bertram, and so he managed to get through hours that would otherwise have felt interminable, and he knew his own impatient disposition well enough to be quite aware that he was capable of walking into Salisbury to meet her.

About three o'clock she came. Carlo went to admit her, and Sir Bertram heard the clear voice ask if she might bring her dog into the house.

“But certainly, Signora.”

And in the hall Sir Bertram came out to

meet her, and she repeated the question about the dog, saying that Carlo had given her leave to bring him in.

"Of course, bring him in ; my sister likes dogs. She is in the little drawing-room—do you know it? I thought so. Julia, here is Miss Harrison," he said, opening the door ; and almost in the act of greeting Miss Norreys, Vera exclaimed,

"The fountain is playing. How charming!"

Sir Bertram smiled, and said,

"Ah! yes. I understood you knew this place very well. I hope you like it; it might be pretty. Come and see the fountain. Julia, you can come?"

He opened the glass doors, and they walked out into the Ladies' Garden, which had already been put into order, and was ready to be planted gaily with Summer flowers. Vera was enchanted with the mossy bank that sheltered it on one side,

planted with rhododendrons just beginning to flower, and the bright tinkle and sparkle of the fountain.

"Do you know Avoncourt so well, then?" asked Miss Norreys. "By-the-by, how did you come to-day? I hope you sent your carriage round to the stables."

"Oh! I walked here. I walk a great deal." This in answer to Miss Norreys' look of surprise. "I have been in the habit of coming here. It was my favourite haunt."

"Just so," put in the Baronet; "and you shall have some tea in the kitchen this afternoon, if you like."

"What do you mean, Bertram? Does he tease you ever, Miss Harrison? It used to be a fault of his, but I thought he had given it up."

"He does not tease me at all," said Vera, but she was blushing furiously. "Who told tales of me, I wonder?"



"I heard about your fancy for tea in my kitchen, you see, but I really do not mind your going there."

"I am very much inclined to take you at your word, to punish you." And then she told Miss Norreys of the occasion to which he referred.

As they wandered about the grounds, he led Vera on to speak of things she liked — of her favourite flowers, of the laying out of gardens, of colours and forms she preferred, carefully gathering up her tastes and views. As they returned to the house he said,

"I hope you will come sometimes and see what we are about here, for I am going to do all sorts of things, now my sister has kindly promised to stay here with me."

"Are you really going to live here? I am so glad! I always thought it such a shame of you to neglect so lovely a place,

and that you must be a very idle man, and hate the duties of property."

The dark flush came into his cheek, and his eye flashed, but in another moment he answered gaily,

"And am I such an idle fellow? And are you satisfied now that I shall not shirk my duties?"

"I cannot say that I know anything about you; but one does form—perhaps very unjustly sometimes—ideas about other people's duties; and I do think that the duties of a land-owner are very great, if he will only do them."

"So with the duties of all of us," said Miss Norreys, gently, with a slight look of surprise that her brother, so impatient of control, should take the rebuke of a girl.

"Yes, indeed," answered Vera; "and I ought to hang my head at having preached

to another, and forgotten my duty of politeness."

"Not to me," he interrupted, hastily. "Tell me what you please. You were right in what you said."

"I was right, I know; but all truths cannot be spoken always, and at all hazards. I fear I spoke bluntly." She looked up with a gentle expression, at the sister rather than the brother, feeling that she would be the one to blame her. "Young people are so hasty, and so ready to give their half-formed judgments. Papa is always warning me of this."

"You are excused, dear," replied Miss Norreys. "I knew your mother, and liked her better than anyone else here; and I will like her daughter now, if she will let me."

"I have never had any woman to care for me," said Vera, with bent head, "except my nurse Brand. It will be a great

happiness to me if you can care for me."

Sir Bertram, smiling to himself at the success of his wishes, passed on a little in front of them, playing with Vera's Scotch terrier, who willingly responded to his advances, having been rather sulky at the want of attention shown him.

Carlo brought some tea into the library, and Vera began :

"How I used to delight in this room! I would peep in, and wonder what you were like, because I was told you always used this room; and I wondered if you had read all those books. I used to want to take some away, and then come for more, when I returned those I had read."

"I wish I could have known that; you should have had them whenever you pleased. You shall choose some now if you like, and I will have them sent to you."

"Oh! thanks, how very kind! There

are many foreign works here I should like so much, and some of our own old poets. Do you know, I once thought of inditing you an epistle to ask for some. Children have such absurd ideas !”

“I wish you had. The letter would have been a curiosity.”

“Indeed it would,” she laughed, “written in a laboured round hand, and with long, flourishing words that would have sounded grand and scholar-like to me.”

“Is that your style? I should have fancied it rather curt and concise—not a word out of its place, not one more than you absolutely mean.”

“That is high praise for a woman. We are usually considered so wordy and diffuse, and deserve to be so considered. Don’t you think so? And is it not because of our imperfect education? Papa often talks to me about these things.”

"Your father is a man of singularly good sense and judgment. He is an immense favourite. I rarely hear but one opinion of him, whether as regards his intellectual or professional qualities, and his kindness of heart is very great."

Vera's soft brown eyes filled with tears as she heard these words; and so true were they that she forgot in them the annoyance and pain her father's irritability caused her.

"Papa is papa!" she said. "He stands alone for me. To him I owe everything, and he has done so much for us both. But I must go, or this same papa will not like to wait for his dinner."

"You will come to me again soon? I shall drive into Salisbury for you. Bertram is in treaty for a pony-carriage for me, and you must try to feel that you are welcome here," said Miss Norreys.

Sir Bertram went with his young guest to

the Park gates, and then returned slowly to the silent house.

Once more Avoncourt seemed restored to life. The gates stood open, and the drive was marked with wheels; neighbouring families, that had visited there in former days, once more rang at its portals; there was no lack of society when it was desired, and the evil fame of the fierce Norreys was forgotten in the sweet gentleness of the present mistress of Avoncourt. Horses and dogs gradually accumulated in the stables, gardeners and grooms were found about the place; the house was open, and fresh, and fair; the great drawing-room was in use, the conservatories were full of flowers, and the gardens were trim and gay in the early Summer.

Julia Norreys was happy in her brother's happiness, though at the bottom of her heart there was a lurking fear of the future.

Perhaps, however, she was herself hardly conscious of this. And Sir Bertram was happy in the present, giving himself up recklessly to the joy of the moment, without allowing a thought of the future to intrude. He was so much engaged, too ; he threw himself, with all the energy and fire of his natural disposition, into the affairs of his property, but all as tending to the one object he had in view ; the cold, hard crust of cynicism he had formerly encouraged as a veil to hide his ardent emotions and his wounded spirit seemed to have broken from him, and he looked younger for the change.

He saw Vera often, but not for long, unless he walked into Salisbury late, and spent some evening hours with her and her father ; and then he felt he was leaving his sister lonely.

One night he came home later than usual, looking tired, and sat silent with a book in



his hand, though evidently he did not read it. Presently he laid it down, and spoke.

“Do you like being here, Julia? Are you content with what I have done to the place? I think it is comfortable enough for you and me, and, as far as I can judge, neither you nor I want a house full of visitors, who care little for us, and for whom it is impossible to care at all. Italy, and my free life there, have made the requirements of English convention hateful to me. I do not know that I could bring myself to remain here always. There is a bit of truth—do you despise me for it?—what is to be done?”

“What has made you restless, Bertie? You were quite happy, and like your old self, last week. Why should you not marry? Have you never thought of it? Forgive me if I have said a word more than I ought,” she added, for she saw a curious change pass over his face, and did not know whether it

was one of joy or pain, from his quivering lip and the inflation of his delicate nostril.

“I have thought of it, and seriously. Vera Harrison is the one woman I have seen, whom I should like to make mistress of Avoncourt. Such a girl, you may say. Nothing matters now what anyone may say. You like her?”

“Yes ; she is bright, and true, and generous-hearted. But—but—I do not like to say it, and yet I must say it, for I have known from the first your feelings towards her—does she like you?”

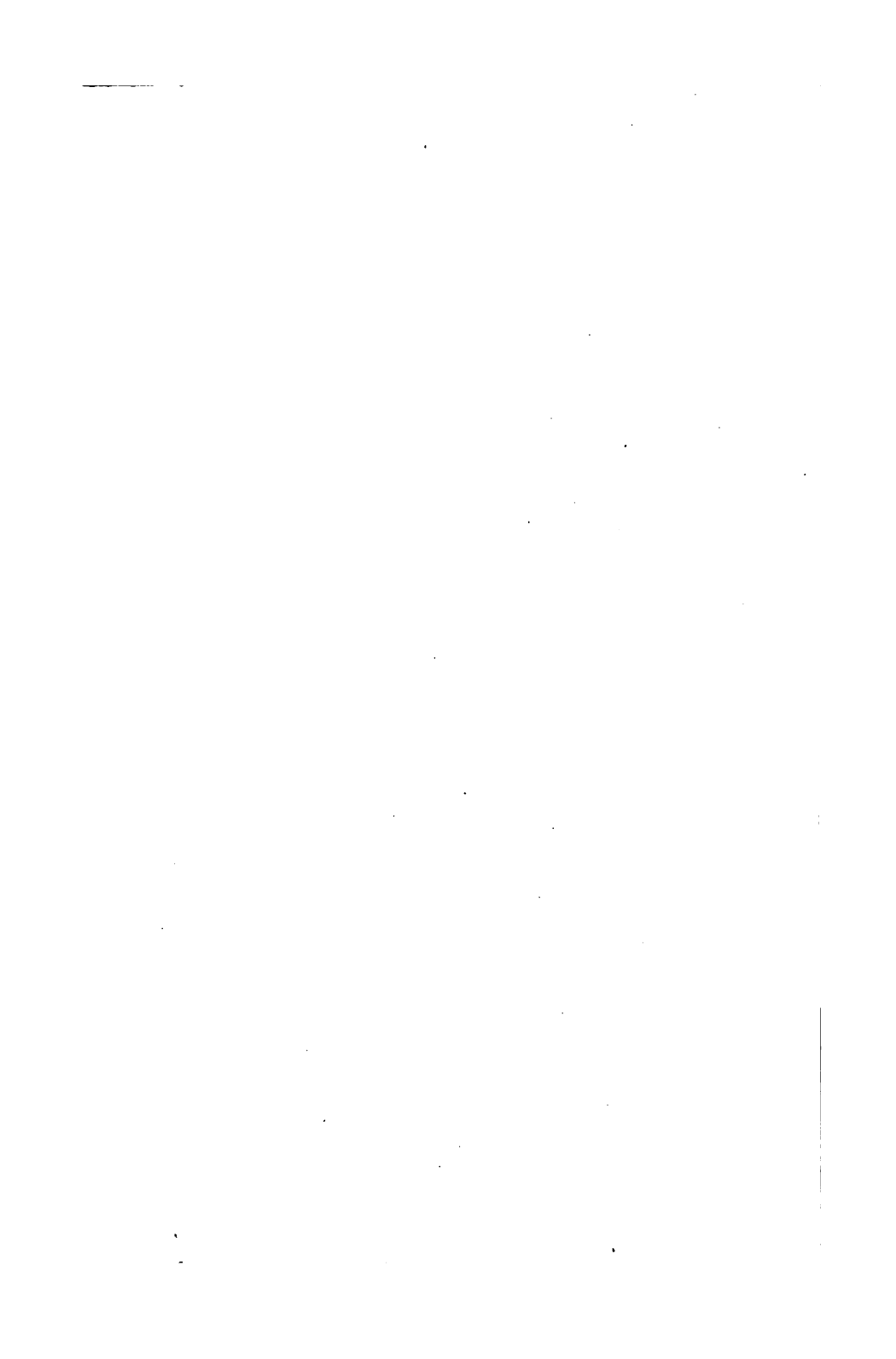
“Yes, she likes me very much ; but love me?—no, not at all. I cannot disguise that fact. But may she? She is heart-whole, that I know. I like her little defiant way of speaking of love and lovers, as if such matters could not touch her. I like her proud, almost boyish independence, when no one shall help or attend to her. I like the

way her head is set on her shoulders ; like a race-horse, you can see her arch her neck, and set her little ears. And I like her sweet, womanly ways, when her kindness and help are wanted. And let me tell you a secret against myself—she is the one creature who shows no fear of me. Were she my wife, I must, for very shame learn to curb my vile, hot temper, if my affection were not enough to bring about that result. It may be a strange thing to say, considering the disparity of years. I respect her almost more than I love her.”

“There are many other girls, some living here, who would be proud to be Lady Norreys, and who are better placed, and handsomer than she is. Opinions are divided about her. I have been told she knows too much, and is conceited about what she knows. I have been told she is unlady-like and officious——”

"That will do," he interrupted, laughing, "all idle tales and jealousy, June. I know better, and so do you. She was out to-night—gone down to Adams' the organist's, who is a great ally of hers, because Mrs. Adams was ill. Adams is a good, quiet man, but has no idea of comfort in his house, or of how to nurse a sick wife. Dr. Harrison spoke of Vera's going there as the most natural thing in the world; but I missed her face and voice, and so came home tired and cross."

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.







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BY  
LEIGHTON  
SON AND  
HODGE.



